







atter who they are, and I'll put myself
the lead could describe their beauty
we saw them face to face, so of course
cannot hope to tell the readers how
great was the charm of these little
princesses, when they had put all their
guise aside and appeared as their
real selves, or how their loveliness can
and did put to shame all the sparkling
jewels in the world ever seen and also
magnificent luxury that the world ever
possessed. Whatever else was beautiful
dainty or delightful in itself faded to
nothingness when contrasted with the
bewitching faces of the Vivian Girls, and
has often been said by those who know
that no other ruler in all the world nor
any children boys or girls or even women
can ever hope to equal or ever will equal
or even get anywhere near to it the
gracious charm of their manner loveliness
and righten righteousness that equalled
their features. Everything about Violet
and her sisters attracted one, even the







of boy scout inspectors, and here they saw the worse horrors of their lives. Violet and her sisters indeed witnessed a heartrending scene. Just as they entered ten children had swooned under a terrible beating from iron piked lashes. It was worse than anything they had ever seen before. The little children stripped naked were literally mangled by the cat-o-nine-tails which tore their skin like knives. Violet and her sisters could see the horrible gashes on the bodies of the children who in truth had died under the scouraging. Then the Glandelinians before their very eyes had torn their bodies open and scattered the entrails all over the floor, it indeed being a horrible sight for the Vivian girls to witness, but they did not dare betray themselves.

VOLUME ONE.

OF THE STORY OF THE VIVIAN GIRLS,

IN WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL,

OF THE GLANDECO-ANGELINIAN WAR STORY,

CAUSED BY THE CHILD SLAVE REBELLION...:

FOURTY SEVEN CHAPTERS TO VOLUME.....:

WRITTEN BY H.J.DARGER.

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AND WITH ALL DETAILS CONFIRMED AS I THE WRITER AND ORIGINATOR
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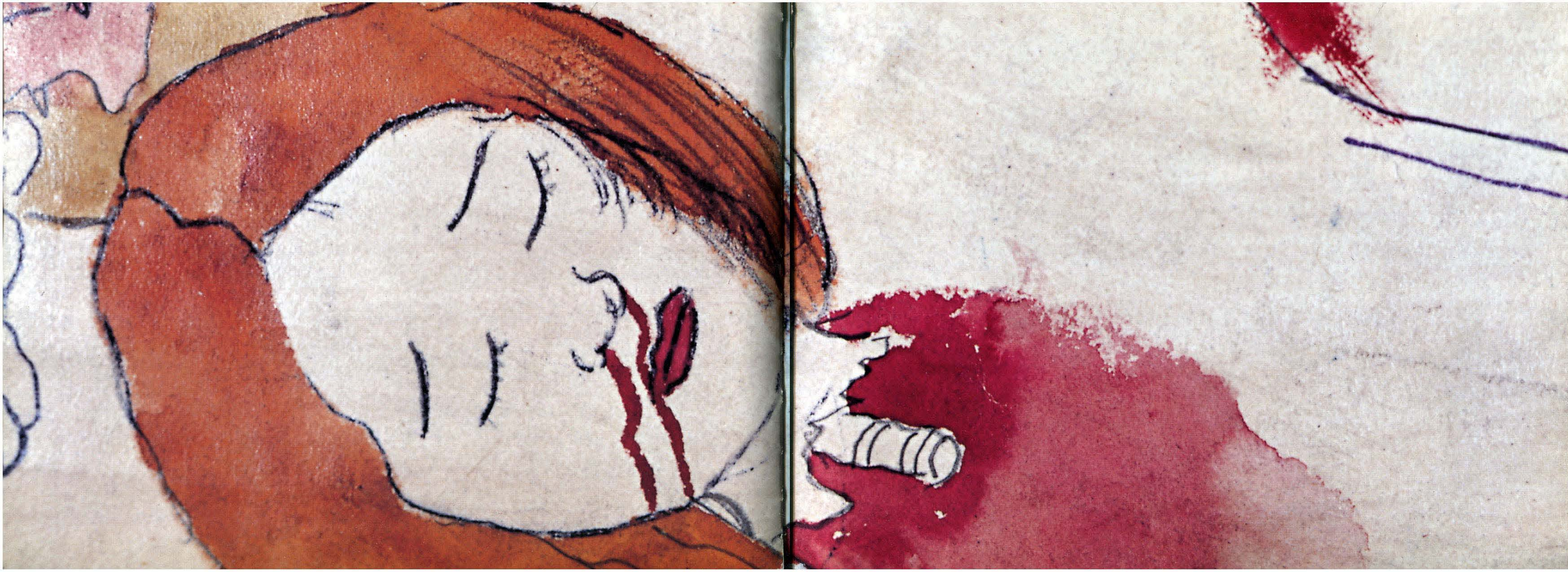
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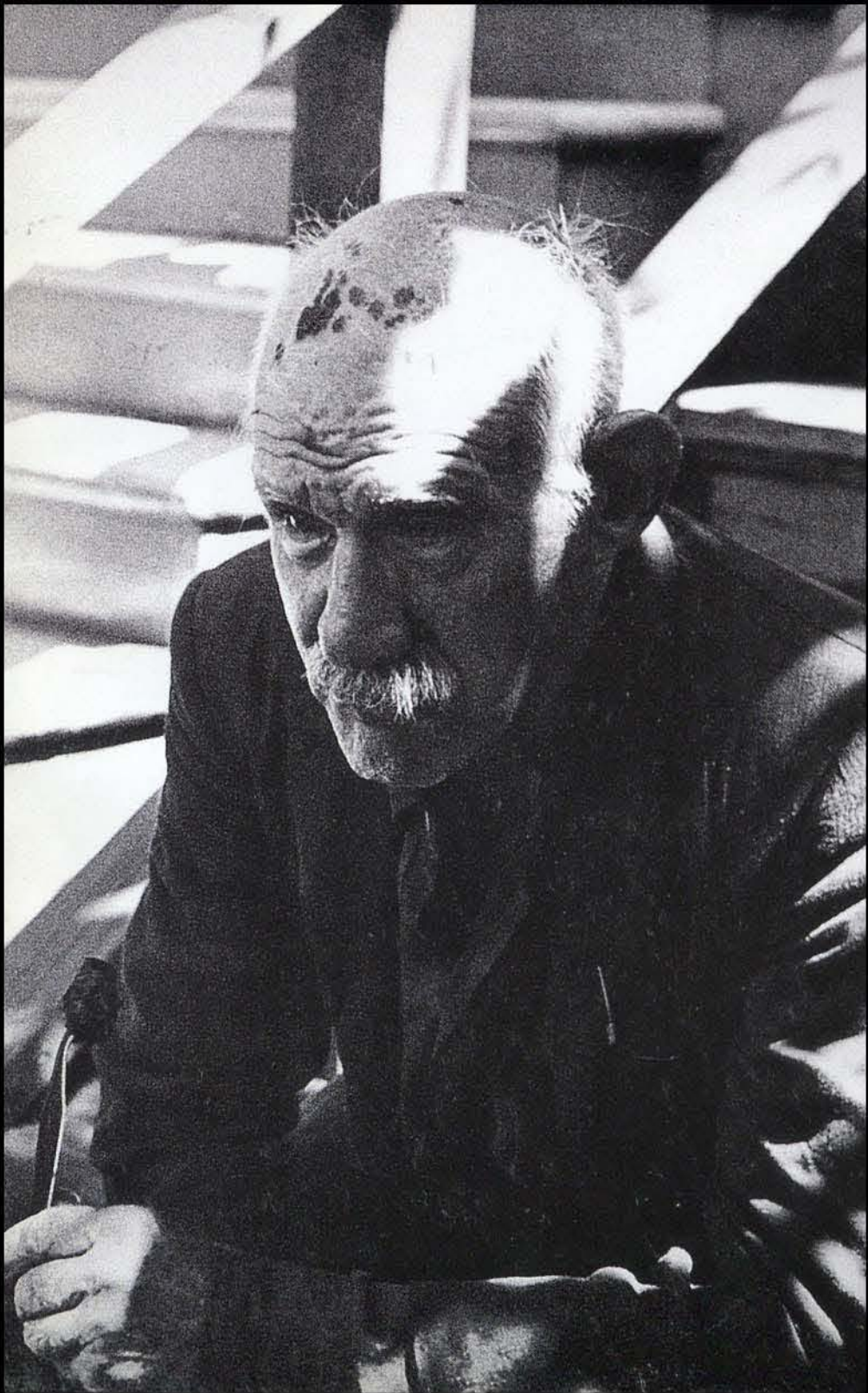
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TOTAL NAME OF STORY. IN THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL...:





HENRY DARGER In the Realms of the Unreal

John M. MacGregor

Delano Greenidge Editions
New York

HENRY DARGER:
IN THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL
by John MacGregor

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spine
see plate 3.57 on p. 170.

back cover
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David Berglund
Photograph of Henry Darger. ©David Berglund.

opposite
see plate 3.32 on p. 147.

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Henry Darger
South. Detail. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and
carbon on paper. 24 x 108 in. Collection of Bob Roth, Chicago.
NL #289. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

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Henry Darger
*At battle near McHollester Run. Vivian Girls fired on near by
from ambush, but they shoot their way to safty without one
being injured.* Detail. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil,
and carbon on paper. 19 x 47 3/4 in. Collection of Bob Roth,
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endpapers
Photographs of the front and rear walls of Henry Darger's
room at 851 Webster Avenue, made during cleanup in 1972.
Photograph by Nathan Lerner ©Kiyoko Lerner.

other frontmatter illustrations
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THESE CHILDREN PICTURED HERE, ARE THE LEADERS OF THE
RECENT CHILD LABOR REVELUTION, WHO WERE MURDERED, ALSO
MURDERED WITH JENNIE ARONBURG, (CALVERINE)
IT IS THE WISH OF GENERALS, SCHLOEDER AND DARGER,
* FOR ANY ONE WHO HAPPENS TO FIND, OR ENTER HERE, SNIEDERS BARN,
TO SOLVE THE MYSTERIES, CONTAINED AMONG EACH, AND TO REVENGE
THEIR DEATHS, UPON ARONBURG, RAYMOND RICHARDSON FEDERAL, AND
THOMAS PHELLINIA WHO ARE THEIR MAIN MURDERERS AN ASSASSINS.
THOMAS ARONBURG FEDERAL, RECENT GOVERNER OF CALVERINE,
IS ALSO THEIR MURDERER FOR REFUSING TO PUNISH THE ASSASSINS,
WHEN HE HAD THE POWER.
THESE REQUESTS ARE NOT FROM THE TWO GENERALS, DARGER
AND WHILLIAN SCHLOEDER BUT FROM THE ANSELIAN GOVERNMENTS
THEMSELVES, AND THOSE WHO MAY COME UPON THIS BARN AND SEE
THIS WILL RECIEVE THE REWARD OF \$1,000,000 IN GOLD, IF SUCCESSFUL
AND DEATH IF UNSUCCESSFUL, FOR THE ATTEMPT IS EXCEEDINGLY DANGEROUS
ON ACCOUNT OF THE FURY OF THE THREE GLANDELINIAN CHETIANS.
DONT FALL REMEMBER, FOR IT IS CERTIAN
DEATH, AS THE GLANDELINIAN MEAN ALL
THEY THREAT UPON THOSE WHO SHADOW
THEM IN ANY WAY.

for my son
Ch'ing-ming

All the Gold in the Gold Mines
All the Silver in the world,
Nay, all the world,
Cannot buy these pictures from me.
Vengeance, thee terrible vengeance
on those who steals or destroys them.

—Henry J. Darger



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FOREWORD

Henry Darger: Artist, Protector of Children

by Nathan Lerner¹

I remember Henry standing out on the porch and looking at me. I think he expected me to say, "You know, Henry, you are going to have to move. The building now belongs to me." It was so pathetic. I don't remember what I said to him, but he just turned around and went upstairs. I saw absolutely no reason why a man who was certainly neutral and harmless should have to move. I think he was very grateful. He wanted to buy me cigars. It was probably a very rare thing for him to think of giving something to someone else.

My neighbors were quite upset when they realized that Henry was going to stay. He was not a very prepossessing-looking guy, with his long coat, dirty and greasy. In summer he'd take a shirt, cut off the sleeves, and he'd sit outside on the stairs. My own experience with him was of somebody who was obviously odd at the very least, and maybe crazy at the other extreme.

People told me of seeing Henry on the street talking to himself. He probably did. I never saw him outside talking to himself, but I heard him in the hallway all the time. He'd be either singing or talking to somebody. He would have lengthy conversations, which were generally a continuation of his daily life with the nuns or his superiors. His imitations were so skillful! There was a woman, whose name was Martha, who lived next door to Henry. She was an older, very nice woman who was kind to Henry. She would sometimes bring him something to eat. Every night at about ten o'clock she would go downstairs and lock the front door. One night she was waiting to lock up. She put her head out in the hallway and could hear a woman

in Henry's room. She could hear a conversation. She obviously couldn't lock the door. She waited until 10:30 and the woman was still there. So she went to Henry's room. A very careful woman, she stood back a way and politely inquired, "Henry, how long will your visitor be there?" Then silence, and a gruff voice from Henry, "What do you mean visitor in here? I don't have any visitor in here."

Henry loved our dog Yuki and would bring it food. He wanted something like our dog to love, and he asked about getting a dog of his own. When he found out how much it would cost it was too much money, so he didn't get the dog. He did want a child. The dog was a kind of substitute. Henry appointed himself the guardian and protector of children. He explained that nothing is more important to God than the fate of a child.

You have to ask yourself, where did all this loneliness come from, and how was he able to cope with it? You ask yourself that question, and then you look around and you see all the books, and you see the drawings, and it is obvious that this was part of the coping. You can understand where the loneliness came from when you read some of his statements about his early life, and you see how it formed his character. This was an extraordinarily intelligent boy who had a childhood marked by great pain, disappointments, and bad experiences, and who can't quite understand why he has been mistreated. He didn't have human relationships, not really. I did not know Henry for twenty years. I don't think anyone knew him. While he seemed a lonely man without friends during the day, at night when he entered his room, his loneli-

ness must have vanished. He was in his own world of imagination, surrounded by all of his creations. He spoke to them and they answered. The room was small, but the world he created there had no boundaries.

I don't remember Henry ever saying thank you. We made a birthday party for him once, a big party with a cake, out in the backyard. We sang songs. He wasn't grateful, I mean he didn't show it in any way. He took it for granted, exactly like a child. He was the center of his world as a child is. A child doesn't become a social creature until later, and doesn't know how to act. Henry didn't know how to act. In his autobiography he says that he always wanted to remain a child. It's as if it was given to him to make good on his wish, to actually remain a child. I remember writing a short story, when I was a boy, called "The Garden." It was about the happiness of a child in this garden. It was like the garden of Eden, with a big wall around it. At one point one of the kids convinced the other children to climb over this wall. When they climbed over the wall they could never get back. Once you lose your innocence there is no way back. Henry managed to stay in there.

But how would a child cope, as a child, living in our society? Pretty much as Henry did. If you are a child you can't get a very sophisticated job because you have to learn certain things in order to cope with sophisticated people. So Henry remained in the garden, and what he became really was what it is almost natural to become if you remain a child. What does a child do? A child goes to school and he's given tasks to do. The teacher says to him, "You are my pet. You are going to help me clean

these erasers." So you learn to do that. In order to live you have to make some money. Henry had to make money by pounding erasers for the rest of his life. So, in a sense, he remained a child. You can almost say to yourself (if you want to pretend), that this was a wish he had, and he was able to achieve it as very few people can.

It is only when you start reading Henry that you begin to understand. I really didn't have a feeling of the torment in this man until I read things like the "Predictions," and saw what was going on. It's one thing to write something about some fanciful country, and make up all kinds of stories, and be involved in all the battles, and quite another to have your own day-to-day life as part of this. It started to become something much more important. The books are very violent. You get a clue about some of his feelings toward children, and that is very interesting because it shows his ambiguity. I can assure you, had I read some of this stuff while he still lived here I would have been very uneasy.

He certainly didn't see life, or reality, in the sense that we so-called "normal" people do. For example, he writes about a girl getting on the streetcar on Western Avenue. Western Avenue exists. Henry had been there, he knows it. She gets off at Belmont, which also exists, and then he says that she walked into the Banshee Forest, where this large animal attacked her. He took her clothes off. That is really kind of sexy. It makes for a wonderful detective story because, when you think about it, Belmont Avenue at Western used to have a large amusement park called Riverside Park. It has been torn down now. They had incredible things there, huge faces. It was like a mysterious,

mystical place for children. Is that what Henry was thinking about? We don't know.

How did Henry develop such discipline? If I had a fraction of the discipline that Henry had, this need that he had to work, I would really be able to make a significant contribution to art. Every minute counted for him, and he did something, not necessarily something of any importance, but he just worked! Where that need came from is an interesting question. He did what had to be done. But what made him do all those things that didn't have to be done?

Somewhere he got the idea that you must not waste a minute. Even at the end of his life, when he was out walking he had to pick up stuff. When he came back to his room he had to take the papers and cut things out, to write in a book about the weather, to take the pieces of string he had found and make balls out of them, to cut out his favorite cartoons and paste them into phone books, and then label all this, and make books out of them. He had to write his life history and then, when there was nothing else to do, he would take out the Bible and just start copying it.

What comes out very strongly, in his diaries and in his autobiography, is that the church was both his refuge and his enemy. Comfort and conflict were the polarities that gave some kind of structure to Henry's life. Maybe that is the whole polarity of any man's life. Who am I, and what am I afraid of? Can it help me or hurt me? There is something that is unknown, you react to it and try to placate this mysterious force out there. Henry reveals a fear of the unknown, which he calls God. God is

the only one who can predict the weather, and what a conceit it is for man to try to do that. So Henry spent part of his life, considering it part of his duty, to show up and ridicule the weatherman. He was doing these jobs for God: making an altar, paying for novenas. But there was this polarity: on the one hand trying to get in good with God, and on the other hand, these feelings he had, that were trying to get out of him, of his own power, his own self. He experienced this vacillation every single day. He loves God, and manages to stand tremendous physical pain. Yet he is not prepared to accept undeserved suffering. So he suffers, and then he taunts God. It is not much different from Pascal, though Pascal did it very consciously. With Henry, I don't think it was at all conscious. Yet this goofy old man somehow had this cosmic struggle, which you usually expect in some great intellectual personality. He philosophizes. He engages in this cosmic struggle with the elemental forces of nature, forces that he actually sees. He shows a fear of the unknown, which he calls God. At times, you might almost think you were reading Spinoza. In Henry's life there is a certain kind of allegorical quality. You can strip away what might appear to many people too mundane, and discover some very elemental things, things that you might expect to find in St. Augustine. And how lucid it all is! Isn't this really the central core? This struggle between his internal self and this unknown force you can call God. At a certain point he begins to leave the world out of it. He's in his room, and he's making up his own world, but he still has this tremendous fear and reverence.

What Henry shows us is Everyman. Every man has both God and Devil in him. But when it is couched in a certain form, it goes way beyond what every person feels. It is on a very high level that Darger goes through this struggle. He has such a unique way of retelling the story of man's struggle within himself, and he tells it in a way that only a genius could do, because Henry invents the form through which he tells it to us. He does it through his writing, and through the drawings where he even invents a new means of visually communicating, without skill, by the use of tracings. It is pure invention. He took these things, he traced them, he organized them in his own way. When he realized it was necessary to make some things larger in order to make them more important, he found a way to have negatives made. He went through all that, and he believed in it so strongly that he spent almost all his money doing it. I don't know of anyone who has overcome so many difficulties and problems. Not having skill, not ever having the opportunity of learning how to draw, he overcame the problem of expression by inventing his own methods. This was a powerful creative process, like a river that has been suddenly dammed up, and is having to find some kind of new way to free its course. Provided with an unfettered imagination, and unaware of conventional solutions, Darger invented and found new meanings and new ways, allowing us to look at and into ourselves, and to ask questions, even forbidden ones, without fear.

¹ Adapted from a taped interview with Nathan Lerner conducted in December 1987.

Henry Darger
The Wilderness in the Dark. They are not scared though. Right panel of a three-panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, carbon, and pencil on paper. 18 x 70 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. #101. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



PREFACE

I am occasionally asked, by individuals unfamiliar with the story, how I happened to "discover" Henry Darger and his other world. In such situations I immediately point out that, in fact, I came rather late to the esoteric realm of Darger study, and that the discoverer in 1972 of Darger's secret life and work was Chicago photographer, artist, designer, and art educator Nathan Lerner (1913–97), who was also, by sheer chance, Henry's landlord and friend. My research follows upon the work of several pioneer investigators, first and foremost Nathan Lerner himself, but also including David Berglund, Michael Bonesteel, Michael Baruch, Michael S. Thompson, Colleen Fitzgibbon, Phyllis Kind, Jack Burnham, Lewis Macadams, Roger Cardinal, Victor Musgrave, Ina Jaffe, Timothy Cohrs, David Greene, Stephen Prokopoff, and Randall Morris. Perhaps the most dedicated of the early students of the Realms of the Unreal was the late Daniel V. Luebbe (1953–94). Although he published nothing on Darger, his notebooks and slide collection, which came into my possession through the extraordinary generosity of Daniel's mother, Mrs. June Luebbe, provided an early and original source of information and documentation. The first exhibition of Darger's work, a daring and now legendary venture, was that organized at Nathan's instigation by C. L. Morrison at the Hyde Park Art Center in September 1977.¹

My first encounter with the work of Henry Darger, which occurred on May 7, 1986, came about as a result of the passionate enthusiasm for Outsider Art of Rebecca Puharich of Baltimore. Determined that I should come to know Darger's pictures, his writings, and his room, she flew me at her own expense to Chicago. There, for the first time, I made the acquaintance of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner,

and set foot, all unknowing, in the Realms of the Unreal. Little did I know that this personal "discovery" of Darger, and Nathan, would change my life. Although at that time it seemed a total impossibility, eight days after that brief encounter I wrote to Nathan telling him of my desire "to come to Chicago to work on Darger for a book." My letter continued, "I am absolutely certain that this is something I want to do. I would be prepared to devote several years to the task ... It remains to be seen how I will ever find a way to undertake study of the material there in Chicago ... Certainly it will be a long term project, my aim would be to produce a very serious and detailed study of the life and work of this man. It would be wonderful to do the first book. Perhaps it is just a dream, but it is one I will pursue with some tenacity." Fifteen years later that dream has become a reality.²

Sadly, towards the end of this lengthy undertaking, on February 8, 1997, Nathan Lerner died. A few days before his death I visited him in the hospital and read aloud a final passage from Darger's writings. Despite the fact that he was terribly sick, Nathan's eyes shone with the old joy, the old excitement, as he listened astonished to Henry's glowing vision of the Realms of the Unreal. It was Nathan's eyes, so clear, so unflinching, that looked for the first time on Darger's alternate world and saw a creation of power and originality, a secret work of art that no one else had ever seen. I want to emphasize how amazing, how utterly unique this act of discovery was. The ability to recognize genius, to identify art, in this rare area of human creativity we call "Outsider" demands astonishing perceptiveness and originality of vision. We owe the preservation of Darger's life work to Nathan. But the story goes

well beyond that initial moment of recognition, because Nathan fought for Darger's art far, far harder than he fought for his own.³ It is unquestionably true that Nathan's later career suffered because of his passionate involvement in the work of this unknown artist. He devoted the final years of his life to obtaining recognition (justice) for the work of a man who never made the slightest effort to seek fame or recognition for himself.

Before I could obtain complete and continuing access to the Darger material, I had to earn the respect and trust of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, both of whom were understandably intensely protective of Henry Darger's work and reputation. I also had to find a means of doing research at a distance, since by then I was living in San Francisco. As the first problem slowly resolved itself, Nathan found a way to contribute to the solution of the second. I became, much to my delight, dog-sitter to Molly, the Lerner's Tibetan terrier. Once or twice each year, for a period of weeks or months, I lived in Nathan and Kiyoko's home with continuous access to Henry's room, his writings, and the surviving paintings preserved next door. While the necessity of commuting to Chicago might seem burdensome, it was, as it turned out, an ideal method of approaching what might otherwise have been an unresolvable problem — coping with a sea of material in which I might easily have drowned. With each visit to Chicago I explored all of the written and graphic material, collecting evidence with reference to very specific research questions. Then, returning home, I would use the intervening months for the slow examination, formulation, and writing of a single chapter.

At the beginning and end of each visit to Chicago I would spend a few days with Nathan and Kiyoko, with Darger the constant and all consuming subject of our conversation. Delightful hours were spent around Henry's table (which had become the Lerner's dining-room table), discussing old memories, new discoveries, and fresh insights, which the systematic investigation of Henry's room was slowly but regularly yielding. I have often compared the excavation of the chaotic contents of that room to an archaeological dig. With the wisdom of age, and a profound experience of art and creativity, Nathan weighed each new fact, each new idea, concerned that there be a firm connection to the pictorial and written evidence and a convincing resemblance to the man he had known. We were all conscious that in a mysterious way Henry Darger was an invisible guest at all of these discussions, just as he was still an unforgettable presence in his room, where much of my work was being done. While, ultimately, I must assume responsibility for this book, and for each and every fact and observation in it (this is particularly so in that the Lerner's never asked to read anything I had written prior to publication), I would be ungrateful and unjust if I did not acknowledge Nathan's enthusiastic participation, his endless contributions of memories and insights, and his warm and supportive friendship and encouragement during the many years it has taken for this study to reach completion.

Kiyoko Lerner, Nathan's wonderful partner in life, not only repeatedly entrusted her home and her dog to my care, but also saw to it that I did not starve when I had insufficient funds in my pocket during my stays in Chicago. Kiyoko also shared her uniquely personal memories of casual but

striking encounters with Henry. Because of her absolute commitment to the realization of her husband's wishes and goals, this project never foundered, despite the loss of Nathan during its difficult, often stressful final stages. To both Nathan and Kiyoko I gladly offer heartfelt thanks.

In the case of a single chapter, chapter 1, which attempts a biographical overview of Darger's external life, research continued throughout all of the visits to Chicago. Despite the assistance offered by Henry himself through his autobiography *The History of My Life*, reconstructing the life course of this extremely private man proved particularly difficult. Every detail in his life history has been authenticated and numerous new facts unearthed. Perhaps the single most important discovery was the death certificate of Henry's mother, Rosie, a document which provided not only her name, but the date and the cause of her death. This loss, along with the simultaneous disappearance of his sister, represented, in my view, the single most significant fact in Darger's life. No attempt has been made to trace the sister who had been "given up for adoption." For assistance in reconstructing Henry's boyhood and adolescence, most of which was spent in two public institutions, I would like, in particular, to thank Sister Hortense Marie Ponthieux, D.C., of Old Saint Patrick's Church, Chicago; Nancy Sandleback of the Archives and Records Center of the Archdiocese of Chicago; Father Jim Close, Director, and John P. Connolly, Assistant to the President, of the Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, Chicago; Nick Posegay, Records Custodian of the Chicago Public Schools; Larry Vischochil, Curator of the Chicago Historical Society; Scott M. Forsythe, Archives Technician, National Archives,

Great Lakes Division, Chicago; and Michael Fish, Director of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, Office of the County Clerk, Chicago. For their help in enabling me to understand something of Henry's life in the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children I would like to express my appreciation to Jessie Shull, former Keeper of Records for the more recent descendant of that one-time institution, and to the Acting Director of the Lincoln Developmental Center, as it is now known, Dr. Ira L. Collins. Thanks also to Donna H. Pegram, Librarian, Lincoln Public Library, who made a special investigation into weather conditions during Henry's five-year stay in the Asylum. With still powerful emotion and deep gratitude, I would like to thank Robert Gebhart, de facto historian of the Lincoln Developmental Center, who at the risk of life and limb guided me through every room of the now ruined Main Building in which Henry lived during his years there. I am quite certain that we were the last people ever to walk through those rooms.

A discovery of absolutely fundamental importance to the understanding of Darger's life and work was the unearthing of the documents connected to his admission to and residence in the Lincoln Asylum. After long years of fruitless searching these essential fragments of his history surfaced in the Illinois State Archives, in Springfield. For making this discovery possible I wish to thank my friend and colleague in the history of psychiatry, Jim Trent, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, the author of *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, an invaluable study of state institutions such as the one in which Henry found himself incarcerated. My gratitude as well to John Daly,

Director of the Illinois State Archives, and particularly to M. Cody Wright, archivist *extraordinaire*, who spent several days guiding me through an otherwise impenetrable mass of ancient records. Henry's later life was also spent in public institutions, the Chicago hospitals in which he worked. I would like to offer my thanks to each of these institutions, Grant Hospital, Alexian Brothers Hospital, and particularly, St. Joseph's Hospital and its Librarian, Gwen Jones.

The Darger family originated in Germany, with Henry's father and his two brothers emigrating to the United States. For his generous assistance in tracing the family history in the town of Meldorf from which they came, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Karsten Schrum, Director of the Dithmarscher Landesmuseum, Meldorf. My thanks too to Robert Kalb, Grand Secretary of the Masonic Order of the State of Illinois; and to Sister Maureen, LSP, Assistant Administrator, Little Sisters of the Poor; and to the Director of St. Augustine's Home for the Aged, where the final months of Darger's life were spent. I was fortunate in being able to locate Darger's burial place with the help of the Director of the Barr Funeral Home who arranged for Henry's burial in All Saints Cemetery, Des Plaines, Illinois. As a result of this discovery, it became possible for Nathan to place the long awaited stone on Henry's unmarked grave. My thanks as well to Soubretta Skyles of the Oakwoods Cemetery Association for her assistance in locating Henry's mother's burial place.

For their help with questions which extended well outside of my area of historical expertise, I offer particular thanks to James G. Piper, Director, Records Division of the Chicago Police Department; to James McPherson, Ph.D., Department of History, Princeton University, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, who patiently answered my inquiries concerning General Vivian and the American Civil War. Consultations with Paola Muggia Stuff, curator of the Cartoon Art Museum, San Francisco, compensated for my ignorance of comic book and cartoon characters familiar to Darger. A rare work of art mentioned by Darger was located with the assistance of Tiffany M. Lee, Administrative Assistant, Twentieth Century Art, at the Metropolitan Museum, New York. To both of these art historian colleagues my thanks. For assistance in the rarefied field of Christian mysticism, my heartfelt gratitude to Father Cyprian J. Lynch, of the Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, New York, and Father William Johnston, author of important studies in Christian mysticism.

Because I never met Henry Darger, it was essential for me to interview people who had known him, even if only superficially. Among the many individuals who had known Henry in one capacity or another, David Berglund and Betsy Fuchs Berglund, his next door neighbors on the same floor of the house on Webster Street, were without question the two individuals closest to him of those I was finally able to locate and interview. During a dark time toward the end of Darger's life when he was really unwell, the Berglunds all but adopted him, cooking his meals, washing his clothes, and generally befriending the sick old man. Their memories of Henry in situations of

unusual intimacy (David even bathed him) were of unique value in enabling me to understand something of his reality in the final years of his life. Then, besides Nathan and Kiyoko, other members of the Lerner family shared memories with me of the tenant next door. Marty and Mimi Lerner, who had also lived in the other apartment on Henry's floor, generously contributed their recollections; and the memories of Nathan's daughter Amy were uniquely important in that she encountered Darger as a little girl. For interesting memories of the little community of artists, musicians, models, and students then living at 851 Webster Street, and in the surrounding neighborhood, I would like to thank Mary E. Dillion, John Semlo, Anthony Petullo, and Andrew J. Epstein.

Serious investigation of Darger's far from conventional life and creative activity necessarily involved extensive psychological investigation and occasional psychoanalytic reconstruction. Although my own background in psychiatry and psychoanalysis has proven invaluable in working with this material, I am not a clinician, and I am particularly grateful for the extraordinary opportunities I have enjoyed of presenting various puzzling aspects of this material to clinically far more experienced physicians and therapists capable of examining the complex biographical evidence with objectivity and insight. It was my privilege to introduce Darger's case at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Miami; and in 1996 at the X World Congress of Psychiatry in Madrid, and at the Canadian Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting in Quebec City. Keynote addresses focused on Darger occurred in 1990 before the members of the American Society of the Psychopathology of Expression, and at Edinburgh University at the

1994 International Art Therapy Symposium. Lectures on Darger were also presented at the Clark Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto (1992); Cornell Medical Center, Grand Rounds, in New York (1993); and the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society Seminar on Art and Creativity (1994). At all of these meetings extensive and thoughtful discussion followed the presentation. These encounters with highly trained clinicians inevitably influenced my evolving conception of Darger's mental state, as did my private and more specific discussions with clinician friends: neurologist Oliver Sacks; psychiatrists Henry Walton and Sula Wolff of Edinburgh, Graeme Taylor, Toronto, Guy Roux, Pau, France, and Christian Shriqui, Quebec; psychoanalysts, Stanley A. Steinberg and Kenneth S. Benau, San Francisco, Beatrice Chemama-Steiner, Paris, and Peter Thomson, Toronto; clinical psychologists Daniel Benveniste, Stephen Walrod, Roy Kahn, and Leonore Mesches of San Francisco; and art therapists, David Henley, Chicago, Peter Byrne and Joyce Laing, Edinburgh, and Beth Pierce Robinson, Kingston, Ontario. Finally, I would like to thank a physician specialist on Art Brut, my dear friend Dr. Jacqueline Poret-Forel, of Lausanne, whose parallel studies of the work of Outsider artist Aloise Corbaz has provided an inspiring example of what prolonged critical and psychological investigation in this field can accomplish.

For many years I was privileged to be an invited member of the San Francisco Psycho-biography Seminar, chaired by my friend the late Peter Ostwald. Ongoing discussion of my work, and two evenings in 1994 devoted specifically to an examination of the Darger material, formed part of the work of the members of this extraordinary group of clinician biographers and historians, to whom I

gladly proffer a special and fond vote of thanks. As a recognized authority in the field of psychiatry and art (biographer of Schumann, Nijinsky, and Glenn Gould), Dr. Ostwald's involvement in my work over the course of many years contributed far more than either of us realized to my slowly developing view of the powerful psychological forces active within Darger. Peter's death in May 1996 deprived the book of its most astute and insightful clinician reader.

Contributing in a different, but no less significant way to an understanding of Darger's creative process, and to an appreciation of his pictorial oeuvre, were a number of artists whose ability to see enhanced my own: in Chicago, Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson; in New York, Gregory Amenoff; in Paris, Michel Nedjar; in Lugano, Alberto Bianda and Luca Patocchi; and in London, Paula Rego and Timothy Hyman. I have also enjoyed the stimulating responsibility of presenting Darger's work in major art colleges. Among the most influential for my work I wish to mention Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota; Parson's School of Design, New York; the School of the Chicago Art Institute; the Edinburgh College of Art, and Duncan of Jordanstone College of the University of Dundee, Scotland, as well as the Slade School at University College London. At the invitation of Jon Thomson, the Director of the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, Darger's life and work formed the subject matter of a seminar for the Graduate Program which took place over several days. Similarly, at the invitation of Thomas Roeske, Darger's work became the subject of intense debate by graduate students in the Graduiertenkolleg of the Department of Art History, Goethe University, Frankfurt. In each of these institutions, students, with their

customary candor, raised questions which invariably stimulated my thinking. To all the students and their courageous teachers, my sincere thanks.

Because a considerable number of Darger's works are now in museums, galleries, and private collections around the world, I have been dependent upon the generosity of a wide range of institutions and individuals for the opportunity of studying Darger's pictures, either in the original or, more rarely, through photographs. I am particularly grateful to the administration and staff of the following institutions: The Milwaukee Art Museum and its dedicated Director, Russell Bowman; Gerard Wertkin, Director of the American Folk Art Museum, New York, with a warm vote of thanks to their ever sympathetic Curator, Lee Kogan; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and its inspired Curator, Maurice Tuchman; the Department of Prints and Drawings, Chicago Art Institute, with special thanks to their lively and enthusiastic Curator, Mark Pascal, whose interest in Darger far surpasses that of his institution (nor would I wish to forget the delightful antics of Sam Carina); the Chicago Cultural Center, and its Curator, Greg Knight; and the National Museum of American Art, and its gifted Curator of Twentieth Century Art, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan. A museum which boasts no Dargers, but has a Director passionate about his work, is the Dahesh Museum in New York; its enormously creative Director, David Farmer, was invariably concerned about and interested in the progress of this piece of research.

Museums and galleries on the other side of both major oceans have generously allowed me to study collage-drawings in their possession. These include the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, and its scholar-director Michel Thévoz; the Outsider Archive, London, and its long-suffering Director, Monika Kinley; l'Aracine, Paris, and its founder Madeleine Lommel; the Musgrave-Kinley Outsider Art Collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, where Darger is championed by Senior Curator Catherine Marshall; and in Japan, my special appreciation to the Ginza Art Space, Tokyo, and its Director, Keiko Hirayama, and Curator, Saeko Fukai. Miss Hirayama's vision in exhibiting Darger's work in Japan in 1997 provided me with a unique occasion for studying the impact of Darger's oeuvre in a totally different cultural context.

While my ambivalent attitude to art dealers is no secret, I cannot but acknowledge the ever helpful assistance generously proffered by Carl Hammer, Director of the Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago; Rosa Esman, Director of the Rosa Esman Gallery, New York; Randall Morris of Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York; and in particular, through many years of friendship and cooperation, Phyllis Kind, Director of the Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York. On a rainy Saturday afternoon, March 17, 1990, I sat on the floor in the basement of Phyllis's gallery, surrounded by Dargers, and drafted an outline of the chapters which provided, with one or two additions, the fundamental backbone of this book. I therefore offer a sincere expression of thanks to this courageous pioneer in the field of Outsider Art.

Private collectors have invariably provided me with generous access to works in their collections, often at considerable inconvenience to themselves. It is as a guest therefore that I wish to thank the following individuals: Sam and Betsey Farber, Siri von Reis, Aaron and Rosa Esman, Robert M. Greenberg, Bob Roth, and Anthony Petullo. For providing study photographs of works in their collections, my thanks to Richard M. Edson of Cognoscenti Fork Art, and to Eugenie Johnson, Myron Shure, Sheldon and Marianne Lubar, Margaret Z. and John E. Robson, Robert Greenberg, and Sam and Betsey Farber. By far the richest contribution of photographs, a labor of love on the part of Daniel Luebbe and Michael Baruch, came my way thanks to the thoughtfulness of Gail Simpson Wolf of Chicago, whose loyalty to her friend Daniel led me to June Luebbe. Without this early archive this book would have been deprived of some of its finest pictures.

Over the years I have worked in one way or another with several filmmakers. The most exciting product of these encounters thus far is without question the short documentary filmed in Darger's room by Claudia Polley and Nigel Noble for the American Folk Art Museum. A far earlier film, shot in Darger's room in 1973 at the time of its discovery, is the work of Colleen Fitzgibbon and Michael S. Thompson, made as a result of the astonishing foresight of Michael Baruch. Other film projects, still unrealized, have nevertheless stimulated serious discussion, in particular those of Lisa Jackson, Robert Greenberg, and Colleen Fitzgibbon.

A number of libraries and librarians have contributed in significant ways to my research. I would like to thank the staff members of the Chicago Public Library who have regularly assisted me, particularly those who inhabit the newspaper archive. At the San Francisco Public Library all of the librarians are consistently helpful, but in particular I would like to thank my friends Judy Kopanic and Joanna Zea. For the investigation of difficult problems I turned on two occasions to Elizabeth Overmyer of the Bay Area Library and Information System who never failed to find answers. My interest in Darger as a maker of maps can be traced to Deborah Carter Park, a Canadian geographer seriously involved in the study of psychotic maps. For technical assistance concerning Darger's unusual photographic techniques I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Lee Ivers at the Kodak Information Center, Rochester, N.Y. The form of branch library in which my first drafts are always written is the coffee house. In Chicago two such institutions functioned in this capacity, Starbucks at the corner of Halsted and Webster is the only one which survives. In San Francisco I am an all but permanent resident, on alternate days, of Pasqua and Cafe Flore. To all of these tolerant institutions, so essential to writers, my thanks.

Given the passionate involvement with his subject typical of any author, it is inevitable that certain friends get drawn into the process, and find themselves doing research for which they are but little rewarded. It is now time to thank these devoted individuals who invested time and energy in discovering missing pieces of Darger's life. In Chicago I owe a particular debt to Bill Schoen whose important discoveries are listed in various footnotes, and to Brad Laesch who was always willing to set off on another quest. In San Francisco James Decambra and Florence Mar used their detective skills on my behalf. To this select group I should also add the names of those friends who were simply there for me, particularly in Chicago where I originally knew no one. Behind each of these names are concealed memories of wonderful times, concerts and dinners, theater and long rambles, and endless conversations about Henry Darger: Bob Roth, Cleo Wilson, Emily Beck, Kenneth Burkhart, Yukiko Koide, Masahiro Okazaki, Scott Portnoy, Judy Saslow, David Syrek, Nancy Tom, Jim Zanzi, and many others who shall remain anonymous. Casting the net slightly further afield, I would want to express my appreciation to my poet friend Tom Krampf, and to Françoise who flourishes despite being a poet's wife. In the same area of New York State I am pleased to acknowledge the friendship and support offered by sculptor Edith Schrot and painter Catherine Downing. For his active efforts on my behalf, my thanks to Robert Brown, formerly of Princeton University Press, who has become a friend.

Switzerland has an unusual commitment to Darger in that it boasts the largest collection of his work outside of America, a gift from Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner. The most loyal European supporter of my work was always and unquestionably the late Geneviève Roulin, Assistant Director of the Collection de l'Art Brut, one of my dearest friends through all the years, and a passionate admirer of the work of Darger. It was Geneviève's commitment to my work that led to the publication of my first Darger books in French and in Italian. Geneviève enjoyed the very special honor of playing the role of Henry Darger in French in Lugano, in a *pièce de théâtre* I wrote especially for her. The first person to perform that part in English was Leigh Armor at the American Folk Art Museum in New York.

In Japan, I discovered friends whose kindness I shall never forget, including Katsumaro Fukazawa, Yoshi Asai (Kiyoko Lerner's brother), and especially my dedicated friend and colleague Yukiko Koide. Working in collaboration with Geneviève Roulin, it was Yukiko who curated the first Darger exhibition in Japan, and who later arranged for the publication of an enlarged version of my first Darger book in Japanese, which she translated.

Over the years in San Francisco another group of friends endured my obsession with Darger, while finding ways to distract me when it all became too much: Lise Deschamps Ostwald, Peter Lemnios, James Decambra, David A. Correia, Stefano and Karen Massei, Gail Atkins, Olga P. Arias, Irene Ward Brydon, Jim Carroll, Lou Carson, Keith Schroeder, Dr. Michaela Glenn, Jerry Polon, Peter Selz, Jeannine Deguire, Roger Wicker, the late Jean-Louis Huot, and my idealistic and generous attorney, Alan B. Porter. Finally, I sadly record the loss of a loving friend who accompanied me through most of the years that I have worked in this field, my dog Woof.

While this project has been for the most part self-supported, a number of individuals assisted my research by subsidizing occasional trips to Chicago. I am in debt to the Los Angeles County Museum for one such journey, and to Sam Farber for another. Toward the end of my Darger study, at the point when support was most urgently needed, a true friend of Henry Darger suddenly and unexpectedly appeared. This extraordinarily kind and generous supporter, Bob Roth, the Maecenas of whom all scholars dream, underwrote the final years of research and writing, even providing funds for a new computer when my ancient IBM proved incapable of handling the huge manuscript. For many years Bob endeavored to find funding in Chicago that would make private publication of this book possible. While ultimately financial support came from another quarter, and a different city, I sincerely offer my thanks to him for being the wonderful friend that he is.

Completed on Saturday, November 22, 1997, the unpublished and unread manuscript of this book slowly attained near legendary status which, in its published form, it may not live up to.⁴ This is so especially because a number of inspired individuals, apparently imagining they had read it in advance of publication, attributed to me various spectacular opinions which in fact I had never written or uttered. Only one person had read the entire manuscript, Betsey Wells Farber, my first editor, whose perceptive comments contributed enormously to the text. Paradoxically, and through hidden channels, it may be that Betsey's belief in my work on Darger was an essential factor finally bringing about the impossible — its publication.

Tracing the invisible pathways by which a book reaches the public in printed form is perhaps unnecessary, since it provides no method or model that can be followed. Nevertheless, the active intervention of a number of caring individuals must be acknowledged. For the discovery of a publisher (who had actually heard of Henry Darger) I am in debt to my friend Roger Wicker of Turtle Island Books, in Oakland, California. Had I wished to cut my text in half, I could have published this book three or four times in the past four years. Delano Greenidge, of Delano Greenidge Editions, New York, was the first publisher not to reject the book *unread* because of its length. Once he had seen it, he displayed unbelievable persistence in seeking a way to bring the impossible project to fruition — winning my respect and trust in the process. Aware from the start of the unique importance of the art of Henry Darger to the history of American art, my intention had always been to research and write the most thorough and extensive study of an Outsider artist ever undertaken. Delano

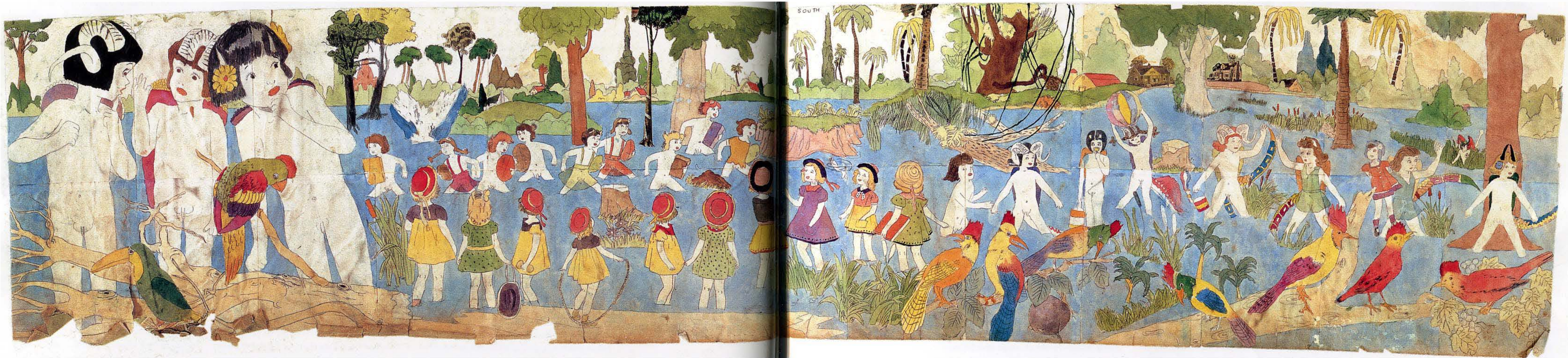
understood the need for such an approach, and committed himself to producing a book unique in the annals of Outsider Art. I have been additionally fortunate in being able to select as trusted collaborators, my editor Judith Ravenscroft, who in a moment of weakness took on the infuriating task of turning a monumental manuscript into a book, and book designer Mark Coleman of the San Francisco firm of Luxon-Carra, assisted by designer Mark Jones, with both of whom I have been privileged to work on two previous books which have been the recipients of design awards. All these co-workers and friends have devoted themselves to giving final shape to a publication worthy of Henry Darger.

The American Folk Art Museum, New York, most recently in the person of its director Gerard Wertkin, has long demonstrated a commitment to Outsider Art, and specifically to the art of Henry Darger. The creation of The Contemporary Center, as a distinct and separate department within the Museum, devoted to Outsider and twentieth-century "self-taught" art and artists, made evident their serious involvement in this new field. A partial gift/purchase, arranged by the Museum with the Nathan Lerner Living Trust and Mrs. Kiyoko Lerner, led to the Museum's acquisition of the entire body of Henry Darger's writings, as well as the largest group of his paintings and drawings in America. This immediately resulted in yet another innovation at the Museum, the creation of The Henry Darger Study Center, under the auspices of The Contemporary Center and its enthusiastic new Director, Brooke Davis Anderson.

Behind the scenes at the Museum, one of its trustees, Sam Farber, has been the motive force behind all of the revolutionary moves described above. His commitment to Outsider Art, and to Henry Darger, extends back in time even before my own. Although he is based in New York, Sam was a regular participant over the years in the "round table discussions" in Nathan Lerner's Chicago home. From the beginning his dream was to bring a significant collection of Darger's works permanently to New York. With the enthusiastic collaboration of Mrs. Kiyoko Lerner and the trustees of the American Folk Art Museum, this dream has been realized to an extent that even Sam could not have envisioned.

At a certain moment, Sam's dreams and mine converged on the seemingly unrealizable goal of publishing the product of twelve years of research and writing. In order to make this huge project possible, Sam generously offered to underwrite the costly process of editing and designing the book, and to do so in a manner that enabled me to work with trusted collaborators. To my friends of many years, Sam Farber and Betsey Wells Farber, I gladly acknowledge a debt of friendship that I can never hope to repay. No words can possibly express the gratitude I feel for their loving support through all the years.

In its final form my writing invariably owes much to my partner Kerry Ko, who selectively tolerates my madness, and who also edits and gives a final polish to each of my manuscripts before they venture out into the world. Were it not for his supportive presence and his firm grip on reality, it is doubtful that I would ever find the courage to abandon research for writing.



Henry Darger
South. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper. 24 x 108 in. Collection of Bob Roth, Chicago. NL # 289.
 ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

INTRODUCTION

"It is strange," said the Captian, "for the prospect that now opens before our eyes, or the suddenness with which it bursts upon us, makes me think as if we were lost on some desolated surface of the moon." "Yes, for to the former there is no more fitting phrase perhaps that can be applied to this scene, than that of absolute unredeemed desolation — so intense, so sad, and bewildering, and terrifying, that I despair of being able to describe it adequately in detail in my diary. It certainly looks like the ruins on the surface of some section of the moon, as if our own world was wiped out by some disaster."

—Henry Darger¹

On a snowy day in November 1972, a poor, badly crippled old man left his room on the third floor of a rooming house in Chicago for the last time. His name was Henry Darger. He had lived in this room for forty years. It was filthy, crammed with his possessions, mostly things found in the garbage. Henry never threw anything out. The room was filled, almost solid, with junk. Henry was now eighty years old and far too feeble to carry anything down the stairs. So he left everything behind. He had no need of his possessions anyway; he was going to an old folks home to die. When he left the room his life was over. His landlord asked him what he wanted done with his possessions. Henry is said to have replied, "You can have them, Mr. Leonard." At that moment the gift had no meaning. There was nothing in the room but garbage. Everything would have to be thrown out.

These seemingly insignificant facts present us with something of a paradox, since part of the garbage found in that room in Chicago is now becoming known around the world. The paintings which surfaced from beneath the junk have been exhibited to wild acclaim in London and Paris, in Lausanne and Lugano, in major cities all over America, and even in Tokyo. An exhibition in 1997 of Darger's work at the American Folk Art Museum in New York inspired an unusual intensity of critical excitement, while attracting numbers of visitors unmatched in the Museum's history.² As well, manuscripts hidden in the trunks in Darger's room contained his voluminous writings. With only a few fragments published as yet, these secret writings have awakened profound curiosity in a public eager to match words with images, illustrations with text. The garbage has turned into art! The issue I want to consider in this brief Introduction is how this happened, and whether it should have happened.

The Discovery

When Darger's landlord, Nathan Lerner, assisted by a young student, David Berglund, began to clean out Henry's room they found some surprises: an eight-volume autobiography, consisting of 5,084 handwritten pages, and entitled *The History of My Life*, which Henry had begun writing in 1963 after retiring. The short autobiographical introduction to what is otherwise an enormous and utterly fantastic piece of imaginative fiction provided some of the crucial pieces of evidence underlying the biographical reconstruction of Darger's life that forms the first chapter of this book. Then, when the old trunks were opened, they made a far more spectacular discovery: a history of another world called *In The Realms of*

the Unreal, in fifteen volumes, 15,145 typewritten pages, unquestionably the longest work of fiction ever written. In time the room also yielded the three huge bound volumes of illustrations for that work, several hundred pictures, many over 12 feet long and painted on both sides. By accident, the landlord had stumbled upon a concealed and secret life work which no one had ever seen: Darger's *alternate world*.

Nathan Lerner, Henry's landlord, was an American artist of very considerable reputation: a world-class photographer, painter and designer, professor of art and design at the "Chicago Bauhaus," a man of unique integrity and humanity. Had the landlord not been an artist of extraordinary sensitivity and originality, Darger's life work, including all of the pictures and writings which were destined to bring him worldwide fame, would have been thrown out as garbage. That is certain!

It was Nathan Lerner who made the initial decision that Darger's pictorial creation was of astounding importance — as art. It was because of this conviction that Nathan saved the writings, the pictures, most of Henry's possessions, and even the room itself.³ But was this what Henry would have wanted?⁴

The Secret Artist

As far as we know, and the question has been investigated in detail, Henry Darger never showed his pictures or his writings to anyone. He never sought to exhibit the paintings, never tried to publish the writings. Although he worked on *In the Realms of the Unreal* and its sequels, from 1911 when he was nineteen years old, until 1971 when he was seventy-nine, writing and painting constantly night after night for sixty years, he hid the product of his creative activity in his room and never told anyone about it.

Henry Darger's art was, and remained, a secret life work, hidden from all eyes. Would he have wanted his pictures exhibited around the world? Would he have wanted his writings published; or books such as this one written about his life and work? Or are we invading the privacy of this man — wrongfully entering his secret world? This is a real moral issue. By what right do we enter Darger's life, explore his room, read his books, look at his paintings?

At this point I want to reveal an aspect of the Darger story which is not widely known. When the work was discovered in Henry's room he was still alive. He lived for another six months. He was resident in a nearby home for the aged run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. He was deeply withdrawn, depressed, silent. One day, soon after the discovery of Henry's life work, David Berglund, the young student who had been helping to clean up the room, went to see Henry in the home. David was very excited. He told Henry of the discovery that had been made — the books, the paintings! Many years later David told me of Henry's reaction: "It was like I had punched him in the stomach,

taken the wind out of him, and he said 'It's too late now.' He didn't want to talk about it."⁵ When David asked him what he wanted done with the work Darger simply said that it should be thrown out. "Throw it all away."⁶

Henry Darger was a recluse, a loner. He worked all of his life in local hospitals as a dishwasher and cleaner. He attended the nearby Catholic church. He could often be seen wandering miles from home, going through garbage cans in the back lanes which are such a ubiquitous feature of Chicago. He spoke very little, and then only about the weather. He avoided contact with people. No one entered his room. Certainly in later life, he had no friends.⁷ Darger was a deeply private man, perhaps mentally disturbed, and certainly pathologically isolated. Why then did he give birth to these images, these writings — this alternate world? To us it is "art." What was it to Henry?

Is the answer perhaps to be found in Darger's autobiography? The early part of this strange document (the first 206 pages) describes his life as a child and adolescent, and then as a laborer in various Chicago hospitals. The remainder of the huge manuscript is pure fantasy. But in all of its more than 5,000 pages, he never mentions having written anything, much less the longest piece of imaginative fiction in the world. He never speaks of having painted any pictures. Only once does he make reference to the making of images. Speaking of his crippled state and the excruciating pain he suffers when standing, he says:

To make matters worse now, I'm an artist, been one for years, and cannot hardly stand on my feet because of my knee to paint on the top of the long picture. Yet off and on I try, and sit down when the ache or pain starts.⁸

So, somewhere in his mind this dishwasher and cleaner was an artist: "Been one for years." A secret artist.

Concealed in the story that is *In the Realms of the Unreal* there is a curious incident, actually a veiled fantasy. At one point in the narrative Darger's little heroines, the Vivian girls, find some old books — in their world, not ours. These books contain a detailed account of the vast war in which they are actively involved. What they have found is a history of the imaginary war signed by "Henry J. Darger, author." Evidently, the children have discovered Henry's books, hidden in the Realms of the Unreal! But, they haven't located the author, because he lives in far-off Chicago.⁹

In the story, the children's uncle, General Hanson Vivian, examines the books and then comments:

"I think I'll try to have him sell me these books and I'll have them published. There is a big fortune in these books for him. He could make three hundred thousand dollars on one of them alone, and there is over nineteen of them here. And I'd like to buy the pictures too if he would sell them."

"I'm sure he won't Uncle," said Catherine, "On the back of them is written the words,

'All the Gold in the Gold Mines
All the Silver in the world,
Nay, all the world,
Cannot buy these pictures from me.
Vengeance, thee terrible vengeance on
those who steals or destroys them.'"

Thus, somewhere in Henry's imagination, his books were valuable, worth publishing; his pictures, too, worth a lot of money. Of course, this was just fantasy, utterly remote from Darger's external reality. Nevertheless, this imaginary incident reveals very clearly that Henry's books and paintings were extremely important to him, but not as something to be sold for mere money. His work was not for sale.

In this brief fantasy Darger sounds almost paranoid, afraid that his books might be stolen or destroyed. In a sense his fears were justified. His work is now bought and sold on the art market like gilt-edged securities. A Darger painting today is worth about \$80,000 and the price is rising fast. In some circles "Art" is only recognized by its price. For some people, only by getting onto the art market and being sold, bought, and collected, do "paintings" become "Art" — even "Outsider Art." On the other hand, the acquisition of Darger collage-drawings by a number of public museums around the world, unquestionably an important indication of their acceptance as "Art," has come about because of the generosity of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, who have donated groups of Darger paintings to major art institutions.

Outsider Artists and Outsider Art

Henry Darger is most commonly, and correctly, classified as an "Outsider artist." In Europe, his work has found acceptance as "Art Brut."¹⁰ These synonymous terms define a very rare form of art made by unusual people who are not artists in any traditional sense. They usually have no art training and, more importantly, they are not generally interested in "making art."¹¹ Well, if they are not making art, what are they doing? The answers to this question are endlessly varied, as varied as the starkly different activities and motivations of each of the individual artists who compose this endlessly diverse group.

- Making maps to orient themselves within the experience of insanity.
- Representing their personal visions of God.
- Drawing diagrams illustrating strange ideas about the interior of their bodies.
- Communicating their personal experience of life on other planets, or their travels in outer space.
- Using images to communicate with the dead.
- Attempting to depict the machines which their enemies use to torture them from a distance.
- Designing anti-gravity airships.
- Diagramming a cure for cancer which they have invented.
- Illustrating their hallucinations.
- Drawing architectural plans for buildings which are actually going to be erected in paradise.
- Depicting the objects of their desire on toilet walls.¹²
- Designing and printing their own money.
- Embodying strange delusions about sex, politics, or religion.
- Making bizarre costumes to wear in their new worlds.

In most cases it is totally irrelevant whether these artists have an audience or not, because, commonly, they are creating only for themselves, or occasionally for an imaginary other. In many instances the images or objects they make are carefully concealed, hidden and protected as secret. Others choose to display their art or themselves in surprisingly unconventional ways. Occasionally they may even have megalomaniacal fantasies of publishing their discoveries, their visions, their ideas, their surprising experiences, in millions of copies, as religious revelation, political propaganda, or public announcements of scientific breakthroughs. These eccentric creators often entertain obsessional fears of their work being stolen or copied. While they may make pictures, only rarely do they hang these images on walls, desire to show them to strangers, or attempt to sell them. Their creations are far too important for that! For the true Outsider artist what they make is important, terribly important: both powerful and dangerous, close to magic because it is a means of permanently altering reality.

For these unusual artists, the ongoing elaboration of what eventually comes to resemble an alternate world, in vast, truly encyclopedic detail, usually entails a considerable rejection of reality. When carried to an extreme, it is reflective of a massively abnormal, though not necessarily pathological, state of consciousness.

Now, as a writer of imaginary history, and as a maker of images of "the Unreal," what was Henry Darger doing if he wasn't making art? The book which follows represents an effort to provide a thoughtful, if tentative, answer to this exceedingly complex question, using all the evidence which

Darger himself provided. But as a simple initial response it can be said that he was constructing an elaborate, private alternate world, a secret world in which it was bearable for him to live. It is my belief that an intensive study of the psychological characteristics and the creative processes involved in the life and work of a single, uniquely important Outsider artist will help to clarify the nature of this unusual form of art, identifying the essential characteristics which mark it off as a form of expression distinct from, and yet surprisingly relevant to, all other forms of contemporary art.

In the Realms of the Unreal

In a real sense, Henry Darger remained a child, not intellectually but emotionally. There was an unmistakable failure to mature. Darger only felt at ease with children. Not real children, imaginary ones, primarily little girls. He found them abandoned in the garbage: in magazines, in coloring books, as fashion illustrations in the newspapers; and in the comics. Little girls no one wanted, he brought home to his room.

Darger was committed at the age of twelve to the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children in Lincoln, Illinois. He was certainly not feeble-minded, but in turn-of-the-century America such institutions served as repositories for all kinds of psychiatric disturbance in children. Reconstructing the horrifying, truly scandalous conditions which characterized the Lincoln Asylum at the time Henry was an inmate there provided for a marvelous exercise in the history of American psychiatry. I was fortunate, after years of digging, in being able to locate the surviving records concerning Darger's admission and his five-year residence in this huge institution for the retarded. It will be

possible to demonstrate clear connections between his adolescence in what he always called "the asylum," and many details of his later fantasy life. Had he not escaped in 1909, it is doubtful that he would ever have been released. There are no indications of any further hospitalizations. Although he worked in hospitals all of his life, there is no reason to believe that he had any further contact with the mental health profession.

Early in his life, in childhood or adolescence, Darger invented seven playmates, the Vivian sisters, in fantasy, in his head. The fantasy grew and grew until it had all but replaced his life. Words, and later the manipulation of borrowed images, became a way of making these fantasies more real, like a child playing ever so seriously with dolls. It would never have occurred to Darger that these serious and secret activities had anything to do with "Art." For sixty years Darger played with his children in an imaginary world — cutting and pasting, tracing and coloring in.

The children's world he was creating was a dark and frightening world at war, a world in which children suffer and fight, desperately struggling against the machinations of evil adults. In this terribly uneven struggle, the children display courage and determination, intelligence and strength.

In the Realms of the Unreal is a fictional history of a civil war fought over the issue of child slavery. However, it will also be explored in this book as a symbolic depiction of an internal mental state: a deeply troubled and troubling externalization of traumatic experiences distressingly familiar to Henry Darger; a revisiting of scenes from his own childhood. Henry appears as a character in his own

story; in fact as we will see in chapter 5, he appears as many characters all named Darger. Some are good men, like Captain Henry Darger, devoting his life to protecting children from harm. But other Dargers in the story are evil, fighting on the side of the Glandelinians against the Christian cause.

We know that Darger wanted desperately to adopt a little girl. He actually tried to do so but, of course, it proved impossible. He didn't know how to go about acquiring a wife, indeed he seems to have known almost nothing about sex. He may not even have known how to "have" a child. In the Realms of the Unreal, however, he had seven perfect, blonde little girls: the Vivian sisters — his dream children.

At one point in the narrative, the seven children discover some of Darger's pictures of children abandoned in an old house. The little girls have a discussion about them. What are they for?

"Every picture seems to look you straight in the face as if you had some secret to tell them, or as if you suspected them of knowing your thoughts." "And probably he had them to use as company, as he was childless." "Maybe that is so, and he wanted them all to look as if they were paying attention to him," said Jennie. "He must have been a very odd man." "I wouldn't mind seeing him," said Violet.

Like the English writer Lewis Carroll, Darger was obsessed by the innocent beauty of female children.¹³ Like Carroll he never speaks directly of matters sexual, at least not in his own voice. Unlike the real little girls favored by Carroll, Darger's imaginary little girls are unusual in possessing male genitals, though they are not boys.¹⁴ This surprising state of affairs will be considered from a psychological viewpoint in chapter 10, "The Phantasy Phallus." What is clear is that, at least in his imagination, this man was massively rearranging reality to conform to his own needs. Given his radical departures from accepted norms, there were obviously reasons why Darger might not wish to share his private world with others.

Darger in the Unreal: The Loss of Boundaries

Within Darger monstrous desires lurked, powerful and disturbing sexual fantasies of strangling little girls. He was obsessed with evil defensively projected onto others. Terrible things happen in the Realms of the Unreal, with the torture and murder of innocent child slaves a regular occurrence. Children are stripped and whipped, burned or boiled alive. They are tied to trees and allowed to freeze, buried up to their necks and left to die. Most commonly they are hanged, disemboweled, cut to pieces, or crucified. Nowhere does Henry admit that these violent desires are his own; yet he depicted them in writing and in painting in infinite, agonizing detail.

The central fact of Darger's life was the loss of his mother before he turned four. She died of one of the common infections which accompanied childbirth in those days. The little girl to whom she gave birth was given up at once for adoption. As Darger put it: "I lost my sister by adoption. I never knew or seen her, or knew her name."

Connected to this early and traumatic loss is another event, the full implications of which we will be concerned to investigate in chapter 9, "The Aronburg Mystery." In July of 1912, Darger lost a photograph. It was a newspaper picture of a little girl named Elsie Paroubek, who had been abducted and strangled in Chicago. The murderer was never found. Darger informs us again and again that the loss of that photograph, and the failure of God to return it, became the cause of the vast child-slave war that is the essential feature of *In the Realms of the Unreal*.¹⁵

Because of his losses and his anger with God, Darger's imaginary world is occasionally overwhelmed with violence, with evil adult males (the Glandelinians) directing their sadistic lust at innocent and, for the most part, helpless little girls. Darger's projected rage and desire was limitless. The result for the children: recurrent bloodbaths — massacres which turn into orgies of strangulation, dismemberment, crucifixion, and most commonly disembowelment.

The written violence in Darger is paralleled by a number of no less violent pictorial illustrations, including Darger's masterpiece in this genre, a triptych entitled *The Massacre of Norma Catherine*, the Outsider equivalent of the Isenheim Altarpiece. While the presentation and discussion of this disturbing material will undoubtedly inspire controversy in some quarters, it will be dealt with in later chapters (particularly chapter 11) objectively and in unflinching detail. Some readers might consider skipping this chapter.

From a psychological standpoint, the split-off "Glandelinian" portion of Darger's psyche is arguably the mind of a serial killer made visible. As I came to know and accept this dark side of Darger, I was forced to confront the possibility that at the age of nineteen, having just escaped from a psychiatric institution, he could have been the killer of Elsie Paroubek. While the surviving documents relating to this unsolved murder are insufficient to provide conclusive proof that Darger was, or was not, involved in her death, my considered opinion is that he probably was not (the material necessary for examining this complex problem is presented in chapters 9 and 11). Nevertheless, the serious consideration of this possibility, as well as the need for a thorough psychological investigation of the various factors underlying the eruption of horrifying violence in the fictional world of *The Realms*, immensely enriched my study of Darger, at the same time adding new force to the concept "Outsider." Would I have undertaken my study of Darger's life and work if I had believed him to be a murderer of little girls? Yes.

Darger was a deeply devout Catholic, attending Mass daily, three or four additional Masses on Sunday, confession weekly. His compulsive involvement with the church across the street provided him with a crucial, if unstable, means of defense. His writings are filled with conventional religious morality, with the Vivian girls perfect models of Catholic rectitude. He describes them as "celestial children."

But, from childhood on, Darger was in conflict with God. He couldn't understand God's failure to answer prayers: to assuage his pain, to give him a child of his own, or to protect children from harm. Henry was tormented by God's evident silence in the face of evil. Throughout his life, his simple but profound belief caused him terrible anguish, often provoking him to rage lived out in the Realms of the Unreal. Darger regularly threatens God:

Am an enemy against the christian cause, and desire with all my heart to see to it that their armies are crushed! I will see to the winning of the war for the Glandelinians. Results of too many unjust trials. Will not bear them under any conditions, even at the risk of loosing my soul, or causing the loss of many others, and vengeance will be shown if further trials continues! God is too hard to me. I will not bear it any longer for no one! Let Him send me to hell, I'm my own man!

At the end of his life Darger collected string, rolling it into balls. The knots and tangles became a particular focus of his fury with God. In an entry in his diaries made in 1968 when he was seventy-six years old, we read:

Over cords falling down, temper spell with some blasphemies. Almost about to throw the ball at Christ statue. Blame him for my bad luck in things. I'm sorry to say so. I'll always be this way, always was, and don't give a damn.

A silent war was being waged in a room in Chicago, and in Darger's soul. So intense was his confusion and pain that he came to resemble, in his writings, one of the Desert Fathers. (At the end of his life he was certainly no less isolated.) Despite the fact that I am not religiously inclined, I found myself seriously exploring the lives and writings of Christian mystics in an attempt to confirm the authenticity and depth of Darger's spiritual anguish.

I am occasionally asked about my experience of spending so many years immersed in Darger. Often I worked in his room late into the night. Occasionally I have been known to speak aloud to Henry. Such an encounter with another mind ultimately involves a deep confrontation with one's own self, with one's own fantasies, with the unlive portions of one's own life, and with the dark forces that lie within. This necessary confrontation with one's self is perhaps the essential component underlying an art historian's choice of an artist to work on. Initially it is arrived at intuitively. In studying any life there is always a risk of getting lost, of identification or of projection, all of which

would result in a loss of objectivity. While I have undoubtedly failed to attain historical and clinical objectivity in all respects, my own psychoanalytic training analysis has provided the best preparation for this work, protecting me from losing myself for too long in Darger's world, while permitting the occasional "regression in the service of the ego," which is essential if one is to understand.

Darger's Writings and the Problem of Outsider Literature

In the Realms of the Unreal is the longest piece of imaginative prose ever written, a work of pure obsession. Taken together, Darger's written texts provide the most extensive body of secret fantasy material ever accumulated by one man. At 30,000 pages, the material is far more extensive, for example, than the verbatim record of a ten-year psychoanalysis. Certainly, this abundant material is reflective (if looked at from a psychiatric standpoint) of considerable psychopathology. It also provides an unbelievably rich source for the detailed psychological investigation of the creative process in a true Outsider artist. Without this written material, it would be extremely difficult to approach the question of meaning in Darger's complex pictorial oeuvre. However, in this highly unusual situation the writings presented me with a very different problem since, given their overwhelming abundance, it has been absolutely impossible for me to read all of them. That process will go on for the rest of my life.

Perhaps the one characteristic of *The Realms* which it is impossible to communicate adequately is its length. At a certain point the length of a written work can change its nature completely. It ceases to be a book, or a piece of writing to be read. With words and images, and the accumulation of detail, not subdued to the task of communication, a different function is revealed: the creation of an alternate reality, a means of living for a lifetime in another world.

This vast accumulation of fantasy, characterized by amazingly fluid associations, the product of over sixty years, provides numerous points of access for the clinician interested in diagnosis. Having presented Darger's "case" to many groups of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, I have become acutely aware of how resistant it is to simplistic assessment. To avoid the danger of saddling Darger with a psychiatric label, which might compromise and distort all of our subsequent efforts to understand him, I have chosen to confine discussion of possible clinical diagnoses to an appendix. Interviews conducted with many individuals who knew Darger on various, invariably superficial, levels convey an impression of a schizoid child-man, avoiding contact, and speaking only about the weather. Some people found him frightening. Others continued to see him as retarded. Absolutely no one glimpsed the complexity that lay hidden within. Needless to say, it is precisely this psychological complexity which makes Darger endlessly fascinating to me. The mind I encounter in the writings reveals an encyclopedic intellect of immense power and range, delighting in preposterous detail, endlessly inventive, often funny, and explosively creative.

Once they are published, Darger's writings will be recognized as being no less original and intriguing than the pictures, the work of a naive literary genius. Of course, the form and style of the writing reflect, in part, Darger's lack of formal education and his tendency to obsessional ideation. It is also characterized by profound internal divisions of a defensive nature. It is, at times, deeply irrational. Outsider literature as a subject of scholarly investigation is still largely unknown in America. This book is therefore as much a study of Outsider writing as of Outsider art.

Because Darger's books exist only as manuscripts preserved in his room, his writings are all but unknown. The difficulty of obtaining continuing access to this fundamental material has marred all prior investigations of Darger's work.¹⁶ In order to discuss the writing, and to provide the detailed evidence essential to a serious analysis of his life and creative activity, it has been necessary throughout my book to include brief, carefully selected passages from *In the Realms of the Unreal*, from *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, and from *The History of My Life*, as well as from all of the journals, diaries, letters, and private papers preserved in the room.¹⁷ For permission to make use of this material over the course of the last ten years, I again acknowledge my deep gratitude to Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner.

As Outsider writing, these quotations had to be reproduced accurately, tidied up as little as possible. Darger makes use consistently of oddities of spelling, unconventional sentence structure, and wildly erratic punctuation. After careful consideration, I decided to "correct" the writings in only two ways. It is easily possible to distinguish between Darger's accidental typing errors, which are legion, and his consistent variant spellings of certain words (cavarly, tward, welmed; christian, which is never capitalized, etc.). I have therefore corrected typing errors, but retained all of the forms of spelling unique to Henry. I have never interfered with Darger's sentence structure, but have, on rare occasion, added bits of punctuation where I felt it would make the reader's task less onerous.

Reinventing Art

Henry Darger was a deeply intelligent, profoundly creative person, in love with words, images, and color. He had an infinite capacity for original pictorial invention. He was a colorist of genius. In truth, he was an artist in love with beauty. In the outside world he was a dishwasher, a nobody. Totally isolated, he had no one to share his dreams, his fantasies, his corny jokes and puns, his endless, playful verbal and graphic inventions. His private world embodied all the richness and pain that was concealed within him.

Completely lacking in formal art training, and with no knowledge of, or interest in, "Art," Darger drew on popular imagery in arriving at his unique methods of creating pictures. The complex nature of this process of "borrowing" is explored in detail in chapter 3. In order to avoid confusion, and to emphasize the extraordinary uniqueness of Darger's representational techniques, which are

for the most part dependent on borrowed forms, I have introduced the term "collage-drawings" to refer to his large-scale watercolor paintings.¹⁸ Every aspect of Darger's picture-making process is unique, arrived at by strange and unconventional paths. Alone in his room, all unaware, Henry Darger was reinventing art.

Darger loved nature, its vast expanses, its gentleness. He worshipped the changing skies, the ever shifting light and color. And yet, strangely, he wrote of and depicted a world destroyed. His imaginary world is torn by forest fires, vast floods, unnatural explosions and earthquakes, and the terrifying violence of tornadoes and cyclones.

Poor Calverinia, both East and West, overwhelmed by hideous floods, torn by battles, made harrowing by massacres of thousands of children, rent and shattered, and torn gaping open by so many terrific explosions, and hidden in all its horrors for months and months by the smoke of forest fires that prevent sunshine even more than a thousand miles away ... A beautiful, magnificent, satisfying outcome of the war so far, is it not?¹⁹

As with war, nature in its more violent moods had become for Darger a mode of expressing, and indeed of experiencing, feeling. Darger's shifting feeling states determine the ever changing weather in *The Realms*. This unusually intimate, wildly irrational relationship to nature is explored in detail in chapter 8, "Nature in *The Realms*," the section of the book which most clearly reveals the incredible range, intensity, and power of Darger's intellect.

In love with the creatures of his imagination, Darger added to nature, inventing the Blengiglomenean serpent, "A creature of flesh and blood same as any other." Chapter 7 is devoted to an investigation of the psychological implications of these wonderful beasts who regularly unsettle *The Realms*. Spectacular dragon-like beings, they are part animal, and often part little girl; but a special little girl equipped with horns, a short stubby tail, and gorgeous butterfly wings. On these wings these beautiful creatures are lifted high above the earth, into the Realms of the Unreal. Darger likes to confuse us, by merging these creatures of his fantasy with real little girls, dressing them in clothes and shoes, so we can't tell which is which, allowing Blengins and children to play together, as friends, in the riotous flower gardens of his imagination.

Would Darger have wished to share this secret world he had created with strangers? With us? With anyone? I raise this question for you to answer, each one, for himself.

Throw It All Away

Remember, when Darger was told that his "other world" had been discovered, he reacted with shock, and with the words, "It's too late." What did he mean? Too late for what? When this incident occurred Henry was waiting for death. For him it was too late, that is obvious. But still, too late for what? Asked what he wanted done with his work Darger is said to have responded that it should be destroyed. Obviously it wasn't.

Instead, this secretive, deeply reclusive man — this nobody — is becoming famous, his work traveling around the world. Obviously, I am part of this betrayal of Darger's wishes. I have spent much of the past ten years in his room, invading the privacy of his life; coming to know the secret writings and the private images made by this anonymous man. I have written books and essays about him, contributing to spreading his name around the world. How do I justify what I am doing?

Obviously, I have had to grapple with this question. Here, at the close of this Introduction, I want to try to provide a personal answer which, while it may not satisfy others, has allowed me to undertake the study of Darger's life and work which follows. I hope I may be forgiven if, for a moment, I indulge in a fantasy of my own, a bit of personal mysticism that reflects my own attitude to life. What I feel is this:

I believe each of us is given a life to live, a specific and unique life similar to no other. I feel it is our duty to live it, as fully, as completely as possible — whatever it may be, good or evil, right or wrong, joyous or agonizing. But this is not a simple task, since we are not provided with a plan in advance. Much of our life is spent trying to find out who we are, what we have been chosen to do. Some of us never do find out. It may well be that what we think is important (our life work for example) is not our real task. Aspects of our life that we may see as insignificant could prove in time to be our real contribution — in the context of a vast scheme,

whose boundaries and whose final implications, we cannot see. Perhaps it is not up to us, or even possible for us, to evaluate what our lives have meant. Only time, history, others coming after us, can see clearly what we have accomplished, what our contributions have been.

Perhaps this was especially true for Henry Darger. Henry's reclusive life, as a dishwasher and cleaner in Chicago could appear to have been a life without meaning — a life of drudgery and terrible loneliness; isolated, with no family or friends, alone in his room with God. Unmistakably, Darger's life was unique, bizarrely personal, pathological perhaps. He lived almost entirely in fantasy, his life a living dream. He does not seem to have understood how extraordinary he was — how strange and beautiful his visions were, or how much they would mean to us. Only now, after he is gone, is the richness of his being unfolding in the world, in ways and to an extent he could never have imagined — and never desired.

For this unintentional gift of art we can only be grateful.

right

Henry Darger

3 At Jennie Richee.

Are pursued down
stream. Puzzle, try to
find them, but they're
in picture. Detail.

Collage-drawing.

Watercolor, pencil

and carbon on pieced

paper. 18 x 47 1/2 in.

Collection of the

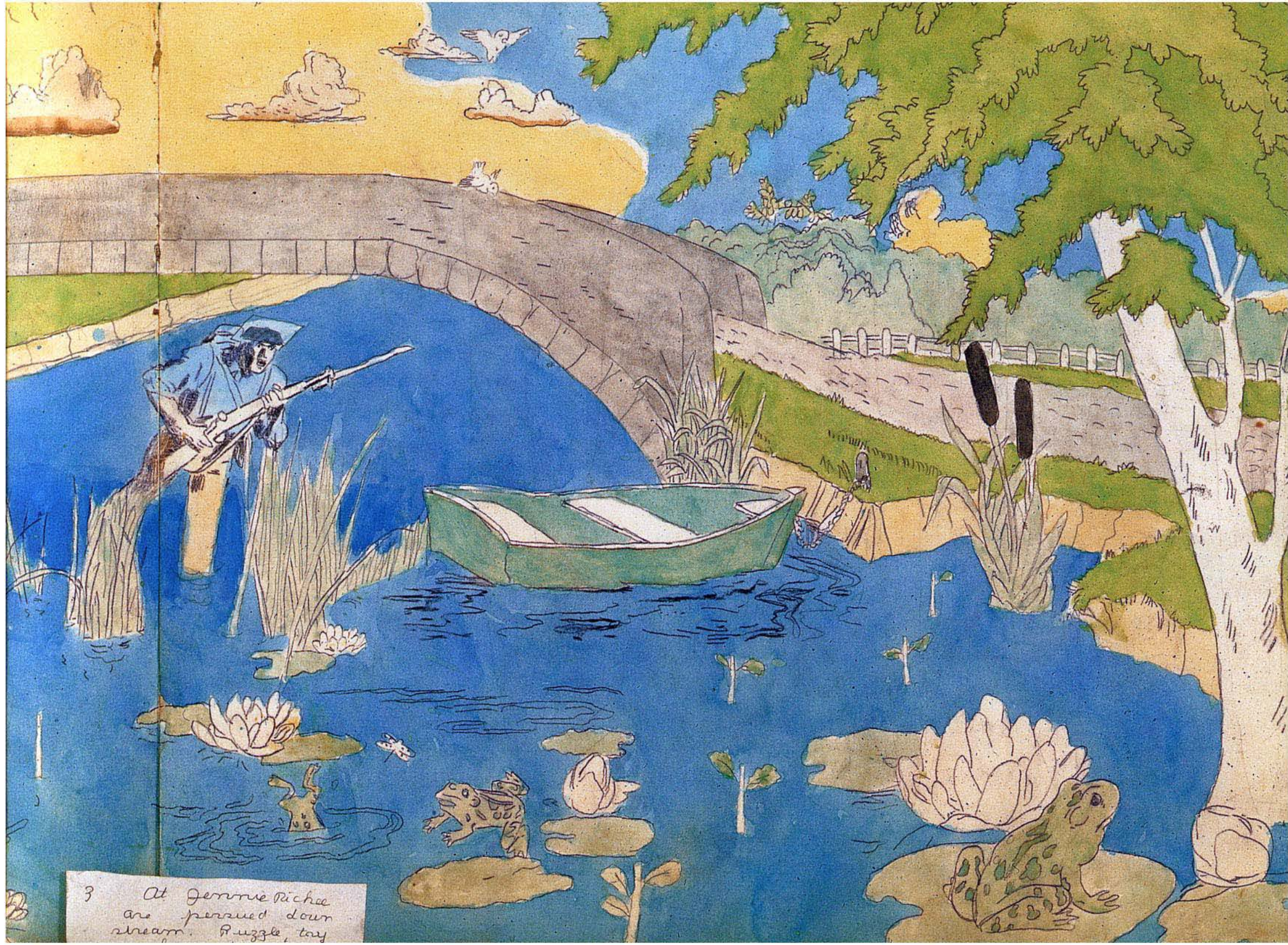
American Folk Art

Museum, New York.

Museum purchase

and gift. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.



3

At Jennie Richee
are pursued down
stream. Puzzle, try

overleaf
Henry Darger
Untitled, Detail.
Collage-drawing.
Watercolor, pencil,
and carbon on paper.
76 x 311 cm.
Collection de l'Art
Brut, Lausanne.
Inv. 9619 (verso).
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Outwardly I conformed, but gradually my energies were withdrawn from the real world, and focused themselves upon an imaginary world. This world was only partly of my own imagining ... History in which I could "live" into which I could escape from the real world.
—Tyrone Guthrie¹

Do you believe it, unlike most children, I hated to see the day come when I will be grown up. I never wanted to. I wished to be young always. I am grown up now and an old lame man, darn it.
—Henry Darger²

HENRY DARGER: On the Autobiography of a Dishwasher

1.1
Henry Darger
The History of My Life,
Volume One.
Collection American
Folk Art Museum,
New York. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.
Photograph by the
author.



The natural and spontaneous unfolding of a life can, especially in its early stages, be massively distorted, even destroyed on occasion, by what seem to be insignificant and arbitrary incidents or experiences. At about the age of eight, not long after he came to live at the "News Boys' Home," Henry Darger acquired the nickname "Crazy."³ The name was to follow him for the rest of his life, influencing the ways in which he was perceived by others, and by himself. Looking back across a span of almost seventy years, Henry attempted to see some justification for the cruel name he had been given. "Yet for other strange things I really did, I was thought of and called 'Crazy.'"⁴ In writing about this painful incident many years later, he repeated the name "Crazy," and his account of how he acquired it, three times in the course of two pages — an indication of its enormous importance in his life, and of his continuing confusion and anguish.⁵

It seems probable that the thoughtless teasing of the other boys was prompted by certain oddities in Henry's manner or behavior. The fact that, somewhat later, he was removed from the Home and placed permanently in a large institution for feeble-minded and disturbed children would suggest that some of the adults in his environment, or at least one, tended to agree with the subjective and imprecise, but perhaps not entirely unjustified, diagnosis of his peers.⁶ Perhaps Darger had begun to yield, to some extent, to the temptation of conforming to the labels that were being arbitrarily, and confusingly, imposed on him. Had he begun, unwittingly, to collaborate in his own destruction? Or was he engaged, even in childhood, in the secret elaboration of a less vulnerable and more satisfying existence in the Realms of the Unreal?

IN THIS CHAPTER, we will explore the relatively uneventful, though tragic, history of Darger's "external life," using the few documents that survive, to obtain a sense of its relentless and increasing failure to correspond to his needs, and to his internal reality. Surprisingly, our most informative and trustworthy source is Henry himself or, more precisely, the first 206 pages of his eight-volume, 5,084-page, handwritten manuscript, *The History of My Life* [1.1].⁷

It is a rare and curious event to come upon a detailed history of the existence of a man of no outward significance; an elaborate autobiography having as its subject the life of a janitor and dishwasher, who lacked any recognition or accomplishments in the outside world.⁸ Were it not for the coexistence of the alternate life and world he described in his vast written and illustrated work, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, and its sequel *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*,⁹ Darger's attempt to write about his history would have to be described as an extraordinarily detailed account of a life not lived.

Despite the presence of areas of astonishingly high functioning, including literary and artistic activity unmistakably indicative of genius, Darger's actual existence could readily be portrayed as a puzzling case of arrested development and autistic withdrawal.¹⁰ His life was incredibly lonely, characterized throughout its long course by extremely superficial social contacts and ever increasing isolation. Most of the richness of his personality and life went into *The Realms*. Nevertheless, his description of his outward life, and particularly his detailed account of his early years, must be examined with considerable care, precisely because

so many of his childhood perceptions and experiences underwent elaborate transformation and displacement in his later fantasy life. Consideration of this complex and beautiful transformative process will allow us to obtain insight into the nature and functioning of Darger's extraordinary imagination and creative drive.

His decision, in 1968 at the age of seventy-six, to begin writing the history of his life may imply a changed perception of himself, and of his importance, brought about by his awareness of the incredible historical and artistic accomplishment represented by *The Realms*.¹¹ If so, it is odd that so little reference is made in the autobiography to his life work as writer and illustrator of events in another world. His secret world, the night world in which he lived out his fantasies, is never touched on in *The History of My Life*. It is as if, having constructed and lived in the magic unreality of the Realms, he felt called upon at the end of his days to record an insignificant outer life which he had only vaguely participated in.

He did so, however, with deep seriousness, and as much honesty as he was capable of. At one point, having discovered that he has left out a detail, he inserts it, and then, apologizing to his reader, he explains: "I'm sorry but if there is anything else again forgotten I will have to write it. I can't be at all left out."¹² He wasn't, but by page 206, having completed his account of the facts of his long life, he took off once again into unexplored unreality, filling the remaining 4,878 pages with sheer invention, yet another adventure in a vast world in ruins.¹³ Because the writing style of *The History of My Life* captures Darger's thought process, and the reality of his external life, so exactly, I will make

use of numerous quotations from it, allowing Henry to tell his own story as much as possible.

HENRY JOSEPH DARGER (1892–1973) was born at home, at 350 24th Street in Chicago, on Tuesday, April 12, 1892.¹⁴ His father, Henry Joseph Darger, Sr. (1840–1908), was fifty-two years old at the time of his birth.¹⁵ His mother, Rosa Darger (née Fullman, 1862–96), who had moved to Illinois a year earlier, was thirty.¹⁶ She was originally from Bell Center, Wisconsin, while her husband, a tailor, was of German origin. He had come to Chicago to live in 1874.¹⁷ They had evidently only been married a short time when their first child, Henry, was born.¹⁸

The Darger family originated in Europe, in the small, north German town of Meldorf.¹⁹ Three brothers, Henry senior (1840–1908), Augustine (1843–1916), and Charles (1844–1925), had emigrated from there to America, while their parents, Henry's paternal grandfather and grandmother, remained in Germany.²⁰ Henry had seen a photograph of his grandfather, and commented:

What he looked like, I would have been dreadfully scared of my Grandfather. Especially because of the awful mustache, and horseshoe in shape. That probably made him look more fierce and stern than he was.²¹

Henry was aware of his father's and uncles' German origin, and he wondered why his father hadn't taught him to speak the German language.²² He was not unaware of the implications of being a foreigner, or in his own case the son of a foreign-born immigrant. It is a matter of some curiosity that, in later life, Darger occasionally maintained the fiction that he was of Brazilian nationality.

In *The Realms* he sometimes betrays ambivalent, even hostile, reactions to people of foreign birth.

"I see you are honest and truthful, and I believe I like you even though you are a foreigner, at least I have nothing against foreigners who are Americans, which is more than can be said of many other kinds of foreigners, especially English ...

I suppose you are so used to your own Nationality that you are satisfied as it is." "No, I'm not so satisfied," said the man gravely. "I used to be proud of my Nationality, but now I wish I had been born an Abbieannian, though I should be proud I know their language as well as mine. But sometimes I think it is not right I should be different from Abbieannians, seeing the kind of good people they are."

"Right or wrong," said the girl spy, "to be different is to be distinguished."²³

Penrod, one of the principal characters in the book, is believed for much of the story to be a Canadian, and therefore a foreigner (see p. 262 below). German boys also appear in the story from time to time.

The Darger brothers were all tailors. Henry senior, the eldest, was seriously crippled, although he was able to work until all but the final five years of his life. Henry's mother, Rosie, is described as a housewife.²⁴

The record of Darger's life begins with two connected events, traumatic and tragic facts which were to play an overwhelmingly important role in determining the future course of his development: the death of his mother, and the loss of his newborn sister. "Also I do not remember the day my mother

died, or who adopted my baby sister, as I was then too young."²⁵ The day was Wednesday, April 1, 1896.²⁶ His young mother, Rosie, died of puerperal septicemia, shortly after giving birth, probably at home, to a little girl.²⁷ Henry was just a few days' short of his fourth birthday.

No record survives of the birth of a little girl.²⁸ Henry was told only that his baby sister had been adopted. "[I] ... lost my sister by adoption, I never knew or seen her, or knew her name."²⁹ The likelihood is that the mother's sudden and unexpected death, and the inability of the grief-stricken and crippled father to care for a newborn child, led to the decision to hand the infant over for adoption.

So traumatic were these two losses that Henry possessed no memories of his mother, or of his life at home with her prior to her death. Strikingly, he does not seem, even in later life, to have known his mother's name.³⁰ His failure to remember anything about her death, or about his sister's disappearance, may have been caused either by the traumatic nature of these events, or by the fact that he may have been absent during those difficult and painful days.³¹ There is a significant gap in Darger's *History*, involving the complete absence of memories, thoughts, overt fantasies, or even questions, about his mother. Only once in *The Realms* does he describe a scene that seems related to this experience, if only as an act of imagination. Darger is explaining the reason for Mary Stanck's grim expression:

While she was sitting here her mind went travelling back to her earliest memories ... She remembered standing beside the hospital bed on which her wounded and dying mother lay, and the

mortally injured mother, gripping her hands fast in her burning ones, was telling her, over and over again, and finishing with — "Never forget how your dear mother and young cousin died Marie. Remember it and never forget. And carry it with thee through life. Now swear by the Virgin to never forget." The frightened little girl had sworn, catching her words from her mother's lips. Since then she had remembered the whole thing for it had been engraved upon her memory forever. But it was long before she understood its meaning. Then she remembered her father's cruelty to her, not from pure senses, but that the loss of his wife so tragically had driven him insane and he knew not what he was doing ... The sight of her dying mother, and of her father's insanity, had inflicted a wound in the child's soul that never healed ... She never pretended to have forgotten as she might have done. She looked back on an early childhood that had because of this been a torture.³²

It was the loss of his baby sister that Darger grieved over in later life. In his copy of the Bible, he filled in the page reserved for the names of children born to the family as follows: "One little girl, disappeared one month after wife died."³³ The awareness of having a lost, but living, baby sister somewhere in the world was to be a theme of dominant importance in his later life. This missing child aged very slowly, always remaining a little girl in his imagination.³⁴

At Home with Father

My father and I lived in a small two story house, on the south side of a short alley between Adams and Monroe St. ... both floors in the house we lived in had only two rooms. One a kitchen with a large stove and behind it a bedroom. The bed was large enough for both my father and I. The stove was used for heating and cooking. During the hot days of summer we usually ate in a restaurant.³⁵

The house, which no longer exists, was a small coach entrance, originally of wood, with two domestic apartments in it, located in the yard of a large house at 165 W. Adams.³⁶ The Darger apartment consisted of two rooms, probably on the upper floor. It faced on an alley used by horses in reaching the rear of the residences and commercial buildings on Adams and Monroe streets (1.2). Later called Marble Place, the alley was unpaved. Several large commercial stables were located on this alley, as well as livery stables, blacksmith shops, and warehouses. Henry would have been able to observe a lot of activity around the huge stables operated by the Adams Express Company and the Brinks Company. The world he lived in was still largely dependent upon horse-drawn vehicles. The neighborhood had begun to take on the commercial character it possesses today. Its original residential nature was deteriorating rapidly, with the houses turning into crowded tenement dwellings. At this time, the population consisted largely of poor Irish immigrants, who tended to cluster around Old St. Patrick's church.³⁷ Why Henry's father chose to live here, rather than in an area dominated by German immigrant families, is not known.

In his account of the years during which he lived alone with his father, Darger portrays their life together as generally idyllic. He describes his father as "a kind and easy going man."³⁸ It's hard to imagine the existence of this man who, now in his late fifties, was forced to struggle, despite his disabilities, to support himself and his small son; attempting to cook, clean, shop, and to do the laundry, in a two-room flat; trying to be both father and mother to an active little boy.³⁹ The task might have been expected to become a little easier as Henry grew slightly older, and began to attend school.

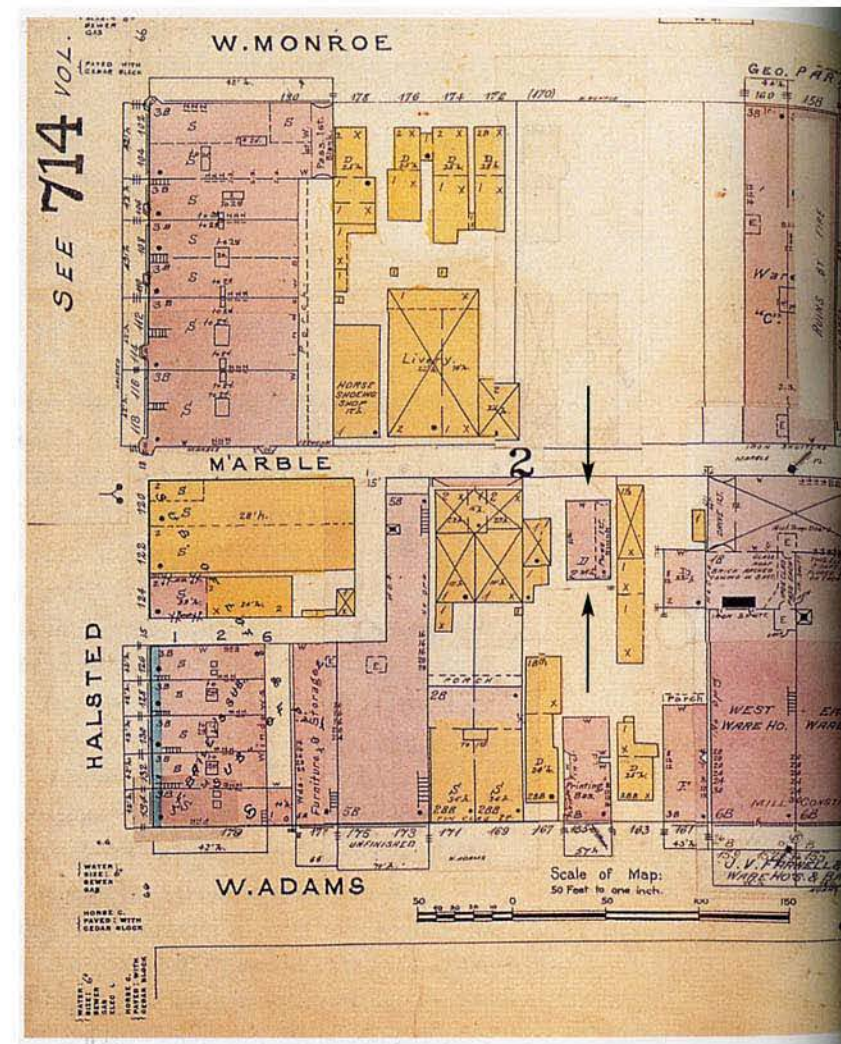
My father besides being a tailor was a very good cook. Once in a while he or I would drink a little beer especially in the summertime on hot days but not in the winter. Oh how good the coffee he could produce by boiling. As he was lame I bought the food coffee milk and other supplies and ran errands.⁴⁰

As a European, Darger senior valued education. Despite his busy schedule he managed to teach his son to read. "Before I went to school however I could read already the newspapers which my father had learned me by study."⁴¹ As an older man, inexperienced with children, the father may have exposed the small boy to far more knowledge and education than would have been customary. Certainly, reading newspapers can't have been typical for children of his age. "For Christmas, I mostly always got colored picture or story books."⁴² It is possible that Henry's love of books, of history, especially accounts of wars and battles, and stories of adventure, had their origin during this happy time with his father. We also hear of his first attempts at painting. "Once in a while,

to paint pictures or anything else, I had paint boxes, but I myself bought them and other interesting articles."⁴³

On the other hand we get the impression that Henry was often alone, with nothing much to do, forced to rely on his own resources to get through the long days. "I will have to say all my childhood days with my father who was very busy, except on Sundays and holidays, were sort of uneventful."⁴⁴ Darger's love of newspapers, his later fantasies of being a newspaper reporter and war correspondent, and his love of pictures of small children in newspaper photographs and drawings, may have originated at this time in his early life, when newspapers provided a means of filling his days, and winning his father's love and respect.

WHAT IS STRIKING to anyone familiar with Darger's final years is the extent to which so many aspects of his day-to-day existence as an adult were modeled on the experience of life with his father. In a two-room flat on Webster Street that was basically kitchen and bedroom, and now seriously crippled himself, he assumed his father's role, lacking only a child of his own to share his life with. Many of his deepest interests as an adult find their origin in his isolated childhood. There is a striking degree of continuity leading from his early years, without interruption, right through his life.



1.2
Fire Insurance Atlas,
plan of buildings on
West Adams Street.
Reproduced, by
permission of the
Chicago Historical
Society, from *Rascher's
Atlas of Chicago*, vol. 1
(1891 corrected to
1895), p. 48

Darger was aware of some of these strange continuities.

I was very interested in summer thunderstorms (still am old as I am) and during winter (cold) could and would stand by the window all day watching it snow, especially if there was a great big blizzard raging. I would also watch it rain with great interest, also short or long showers.⁴⁵

Acute sensitivity to weather conditions, and an astonishingly accurate memory for the dates of unusual meteorological events, big snow falls, high or low temperatures, violent storms, etc., remained central to Darger's later life. His intense response to the sky, to clouds and unusual effects of light, may have first taken shape when he spent whole days looking out of the front windows of his father's house.⁴⁶

Weather conditions and changing effects of light and clouds in the sky seem to have become linked early in his experience with subjective feelings and moods, allowing him to make symbolic contact with internal states which he often had no means of grasping or expressing otherwise. In later life Darger monitored the sky and changing temperatures the way a diarist examines his inner world.⁴⁷ "I would not stand a snowless winter. I cried once when snow stopped falling, and my poor father looked at me so queer. It must have been unusual for him, or to him."⁴⁸

One of the principal themes appearing again and again in Darger's autobiography, and also in *The Realms*, is fire and his intense response to it. Many of his earliest memories concern fires which he saw, or set. His early preoccupation with

burning buildings is mirrored in later life in the "fire journals" in which he kept newspaper accounts and photographs of Chicago fires (see illustration 3.4).

His initial response to burning buildings seems to have been largely fear. He seems to have mastered this raw emotion, transforming it into excitement and a desire to play with fire.⁴⁹ He describes an early memory of watching a fire on Monroe Street, from a third-floor porch, across from his house. "I did not go to it though as the day was very cold."⁵⁰ Soon his attraction to fire becomes stronger and more evident.

Big or small as they were, I would never run to or go to fires. I'd at home watch the great cloud of smoke, or the glow in the sky by nighttime. I was scared of burning buildings on fire for fear of falling walls or other debris.⁵¹

This was an interest Henry shared with his father. He describes how they went to big fires together, perhaps sharing a common emotional response.

Once on a late summer afternoon my father took me to a big one close to home on the corner of Washington street close to Halsted. We stood watching it across Washington on the south side. He told me it was a tar factory. It was not a wide building only 6 windows across but it stood 10 stories high and was like an inferno from the street to the top floor. We did not stay watching it very long. The fire was in the late afternoon but also raged all night, keeping the sky all lighted up ... I did not go near the fire that day any more as I was afraid.⁵²

Henry's later extraordinarily imaginative accounts of vast forest fires and exploding buildings in *The Realms* seem to embody extremes of emotion having nothing to do with actual experience of fire. As with his strangely subjective reaction to weather, his response to fire and his fantasies about it seem to be a means of externalizing extremely intense but repressed emotion, in particular, violent rage coupled with acute anxiety.

Not surprisingly, Henry began to play with fire at an early age. Here for the first time we begin to sense a lack of judgement and the possibility that he might have been dangerous.

Once not knowing any better I put lots of newspaper beside the stove, near the wall, and set it on fire. I got my ears boxed good and proper. I got it good once again from my father, when he thought from my action that I was going to do it again. But I had no intention of doing so.⁵³

Between the lines it is possible to sense the father's growing concern at what could happen in his absence. "I was also crazy about making bonfires."⁵⁴ Essentially unsupervised, Henry represented a danger to himself and others.

One of the strangest incidents in Darger's early years is described at some length in his life story. It is an account of how he set a fire to get revenge on a fruit and vegetable man who had accused him of stealing. His mode of telling the story, in old age, captures something of Henry's extraordinary perception of his own reality.

In order to get even with him, when he was not at home (he being a peddler) I took a few of the crates piled them in the center of his yard and set them on fire.

Then I quickly left and sat on the steps in front of the house facing the alley. My father soon came out, it being near night, and sat with me. Just about dark we both noticed a light of brightness which I felt sure could not come from the few crates I set afire. I ran over there to see what was [the] cause. Against the west side of the house the peddler had stacked by three wide a actual wall of the crates. I could not believe my little bonfire so far from there could cause it, but the shebang, included the side of the house, was one high towering mass of singing flame. Some of the blazing crates crashed down, bouncing and covering the spot where I made the little one, erasing evidence against me ... The cause of the fire was never known but secretly I found sure proof that my little revengeful bonfire did not do it.⁵⁵

Writing seventy years after the fact, Darger still sounds astonishingly like the little boy he once was, attempting to rationalize his way around reality with the naiveté of a child. This is one of the pervasive characteristics of *The History of My Life*, a curious vagueness and understatement about incidents which were obviously far more serious than they are made to seem. Not only did he not grasp their significance as a child, but he had no more insight into them as an adult, trying to understand their meaning in retrospect.

The most revealing and potentially dangerous theme in Darger's account of his childhood with his father concerns his relations with other children, or more precisely with children smaller

than himself. "During my youngest days before I went to school, and not knowing any better, I hated baby kids, those who were old enough to stand or walk. It was caused I believe because I had no brother, and lost my sister by adoption."⁵⁶ In the history of his life, he described attacks on children which, starting innocently enough, quickly increase in violence. "I was a meany one day when for spite, I know not why, I shoved a two-year-old child down, and made it cry. No one seen it down and the child did not tell on me."⁵⁷ When we realize that this incident occurred on a third-floor porch, the possibility of a very different ending to this harmless event presents itself, a possibility which Henry seems, even then, to have entertained in fantasy.

Initially, his innocent attacks were all focused on little girls. While he seems to have understood that his aggressive behavior toward them was somehow connected with the loss of his sister, he had no understanding of the terrible rage he felt toward that little girl whose arrival in the world had mysteriously deprived him of his mother. His wish to harm small children was soon thoroughly repressed, and replaced by its opposite, an amazing conversion of which Darger was, surprisingly, aware.

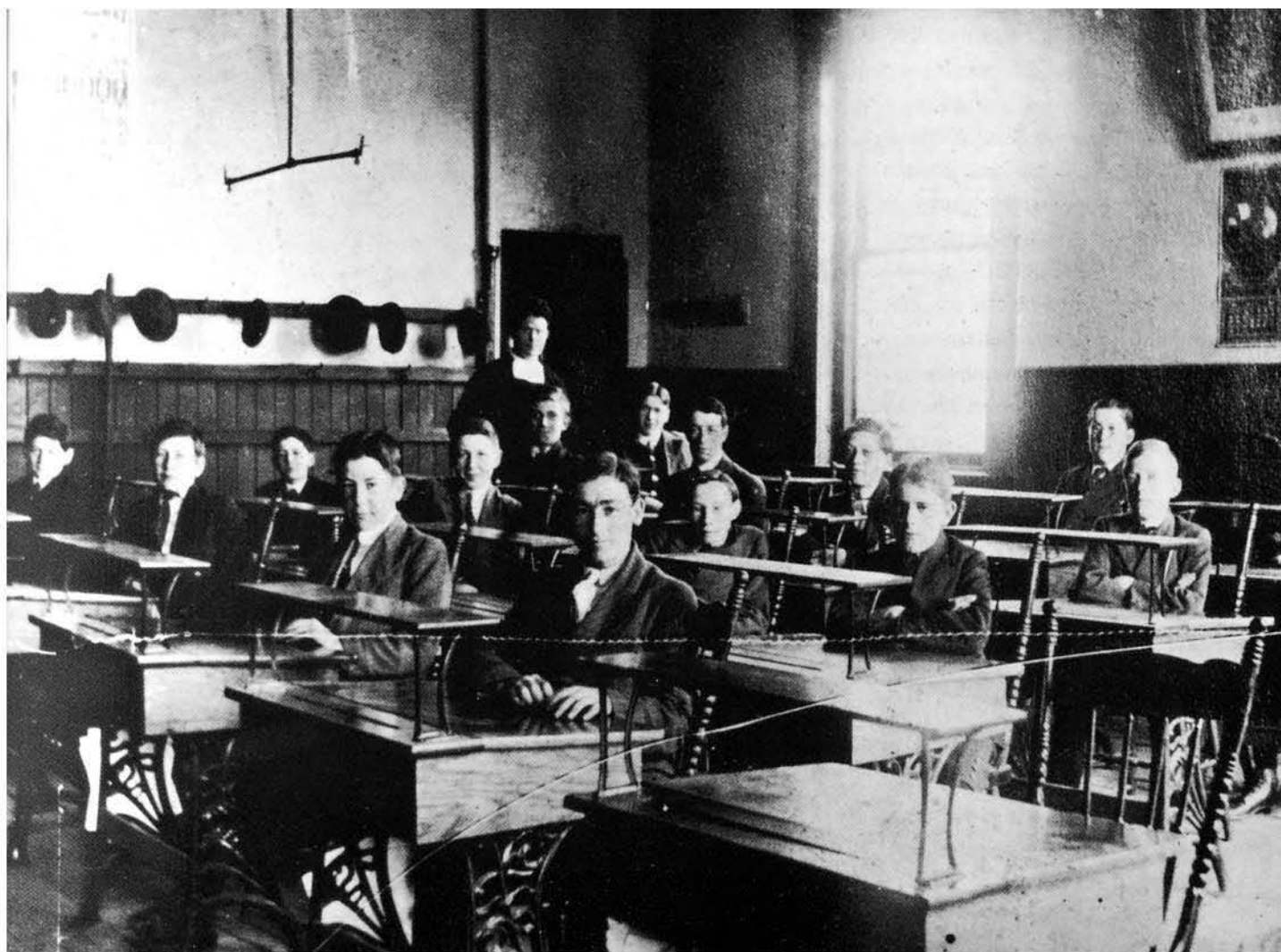
You remember I wrote that I hated baby kids. So indeed I did. Yet what a change came in me though when I grew somewhat older. Then babies at that were more to me than anything, more than the world. I would fondle them and love them. At that time just any bigger boy or even grown up dare molest or harm them in any way.⁵⁸

1.3 below
Henry Darger
At Phelantonburg.
What they saw. Detail.
Collage Drawing.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



1.4

St. Patrick's Catholic Boys School, interior, 1910. Photograph courtesy of the Archives of Old St. Patrick's Church, Chicago.



Here in embryo is the announcement of one of the great themes of *The Realms*, the curious juxtaposition of his deep love for children, and his desire to protect them from harm; and fantasies of sadistic, indeed murderous, attacks on children, principally by monstrously evil adults (see chapter 11). Hovering over this account of his feelings about little children is the specter of a strangled child, its throat grasped by monstrous hands, its tongue out, an image that pervades Darger's innocent art (1. 3). The repression of truly massive rage, and the potentially unstable reaction formation which inspired his obsessive preoccupation with, and love of, little girls, were maintained at white-hot intensity throughout his life. Locked together in almost perfectly balanced ambivalence, they provided the nuclear fuel burning in the dark core of the Realms of the Unreal.

WHILE STILL LIVING with his father, Henry began school, attending Catholic schools operated by the clergy of Old St. Patrick's church, and located just down the street from his home.⁵⁹ "I went to St. Patrick's Catholic on Desplains and Adams, first to a sisters' school,⁶⁰ and then one operated by the Catholic Christian brothers."⁶¹ (1. 4) Henry seems to have been a good student. He says that he excelled in spelling, but was rather poor in figures and geography. Given his later passion for the American Civil War, and his adult obsession with the construction of imaginary histories, it is not surprising to discover that even as a small boy, Henry loved history. "History I almost knew it by heart."⁶² He claims to have been immediately transferred from the first to third grade when it was discovered that he could read. If this was so, it might help to explain what appears to be a total lack of friends, or any kind of relationship with children of his own age. From the very beginning

of his life story, Henry appears to have been isolated, responsive to no one but his father, and perhaps other members of the Darger family.

One thing I must write is that us children in those days were looked on as beneath the dignity the worst to think of of grown ups and did not amount to much, where as to my opinion or feeling, all grown ups, and especially all types of strangers, and those I did not like were less than the dust or mud beneath my feet.⁶³

I was of the kind that only my father could tell me what to do, and would take no scolding, or authority from anyone else.⁶⁴

Many children might make such a proud statement, but we have to weigh Darger's words with special care. It is difficult to determine whether he was inclined to exaggerate in retrospect, or, on the contrary, to make light of significant events which were leading an isolated and increasingly disturbed child into more and more serious trouble.

[W]hen I was a small boy ... once in school for some kind of cutting up a teacher boxed my ears, and my father had to pay the doctor's bills for what I did to her. I slashed her on the face and arm with my long knife ... When I was aroused I was dangerous.⁶⁵

If such an event actually occurred while Henry was still living with his father, it would appear that his ability to supervise and control his son was deteriorating rapidly. Henry was often left unattended, and at the same time he was becoming more aggressive. As he grew older, his father seems to have become increasingly ineffectual. "At least when going to school after that my father would not let me take my knife, or any other weapon with me."⁶⁶

The account of the attack on a female teacher, even if it involves an element of exaggeration, would still seem to suggest that the situation was getting completely out of control. Henry also mentions several assaults on other boys, one of which he claims put a child in hospital for a long time. It is difficult to grasp that Henry was no more than seven or eight years old. "I was a very dangerous kid if not left alone."⁶⁷ As a result of one or another of these incidents, Henry appears to have come into contact for the first time with the law.

Another thing that happened when I was young, was without the least expectation I was taken from my father and hustled off by train to a certain small boys home at Morton Grove. I was there however for a short time when my father came and took me right home and for good. That never happened again. And for a good reason. Nobody could fool with my father, not even law officials.⁶⁸

Not only was Henry becoming dangerous, but he himself was at risk. In light of later developments in his life, it is necessary to consider whether he might not have been the victim of sexual assault in these early and unsupervised years. "I used to go and see a night watchman in a six story building a short distance from where we lived."⁶⁹ Though this may have been an innocent friendship, it suggests that certain unmet needs were leading Henry to seek friends in less than ideal situations. He appears to have been aware of possible danger from people he encountered on the street.

While still living with my father I was out alone playing in Adams street. An old man that had the appearance of what we call now a skid row bum, appeared as if he wanted to kidnap me. I'm alert and very dangerous to those kind ... Molested I was a brick thrower, and there are some big bullies who molesting me, can now if still living at this time can confirm my statement. I never missed.⁷⁰

IF WE STEP outside of Darger's view of the situation, for a moment, it can readily be seen that he was involved with activities which, even in the context of turn-of-the-century Chicago, were classifiable as delinquent behavior. Significantly, it was at this very time that the Juvenile Court of Chicago came into being, charged with "the Care of Dependent, Neglected, and Delinquent Children." A study of the functions of that court, published in 1912 and entitled *The Delinquent Child and the Home*, makes it very apparent that the situation in which Henry found himself was not uncommon in the Chicago of 1900, but was considered by the social welfare authorities to lead, almost inevitably, to serious risk of delinquency. Cases such as his were very familiar to the judicial authorities.

The number of children who are wholly orphaned is very much smaller than the number of those who have lost only one parent: but even this slighter misfortune is a heavy one; as the surviving parent usually proves quite incapable of playing the part of both father and mother.

Particular attention is drawn in the study to:
... the father who attempts to carry on the burden of training and care along with the burden of support ... When the mother dies the father may

*secure a housekeeper, or a woman relative may be at hand to tide over the interval until probable remarriage. If, however, these substitutes for the mother's care are not available, or if the father ... fails to provide the necessary supervision, the children are likely to come to grief.*⁷¹

In that no one else in the Darger family seems to have become involved with Henry's day-to-day care, he can be seen to fit very well into the category of children at risk.

Another factor familiar to the courts, and discussed in this study, was the danger represented by the failure of foreign immigrants in Chicago to fully understand the danger of unsupervised children in an urban environment.⁷²

*Many of these children suffer from lack of parental care and discipline because the parents are strangers in a strange land and cannot foresee the dangers to which children will be exposed, nor train them to resist temptations which appear in novel guise, nor protect them in the hour of real trial.*⁷³

While Henry's father was neither irresponsible nor lacking in concern, he does not appear to have grasped the increasingly precarious position of his son, whose violent behavior was likely to bring him into conflict with the law.

Henry's aggression found symbolic outlet in another surprising direction. "In my younger days I forgot to mention when angry over something I burned holy pictures and hit the face of Christ in pictures with my fist."⁷⁴ It isn't clear how early these sacrilegious attacks on images began in Darger's boyhood, but the reference to "burning" images probably links the onset of this unique form of violence to the period when he was living at home and had easy access to a stove and fire. It also seems to belong to a phase of Darger's education when he would have been exposed to intense Roman Catholic indoctrination. This was probably most strongly the case when he was attending St. Patrick's School, and was under the supervision of the Christian Brothers. Children in such schools were regularly given small religious images as rewards for achievement or on Holy Days. Contained in this curious account of childhood blasphemies, in nascent form, is the whole of Darger's later intensely personal and ambivalent relationship with God. These attacks on holy images continued unabated into later life, inspiring considerable internal conflict and guilt. It is surprising to discover rage in a child directed at the remote figure of God or Christ. It seems unlikely to have been displaced anger originally directed at his father. Is it possible that even as a boy Darger had grasped the role played by God in the death of his mother and the disappearance of his sister? Had the quarrel with God which was to dominate and direct so much of his later life already begun?

HENRY'S ACCOUNT of the end of his life at home with his father leaves a great deal to be explained. "I do not remember the number of years I lived with my father."⁷⁵ He links the ending of this important period, and the beginning of his new life in the News Boys' Home, with two events: the One Hundred Days War with Spain (1898), when he was six; and his baptism at eight years of age.⁷⁶

My Godmother, which until now I forgot to mention, who proceeded at my Baptism at eight years of age,⁷⁷ took me to a place on Jackson Boulevard, nicknamed the News boys home. The right name was "the Mission of Our Lady of Mercy."⁷⁸

Henry's explanation of why this occurred focuses exclusively on his father's ill-health. "As time passed on, my father grew worse in his crippled condition. I believe my uncles paid my father's way into the St. Augustine Poor House."⁷⁹ Apparently it had become impossible for Darger senior both to work and to manage to care for his son.⁸⁰ Henry's contribution to the impossible situation is not mentioned, nor is it probable that he ever understood the part he played in bringing it about.⁸¹

The News Boys' Home

Darger's understanding of why he was taken away from his father, and placed in an institution for homeless boys, was very limited, both at the time it occurred and at the end of his life when he was writing about it. It isn't clear if it was a family decision, or whether the social welfare services had become involved.⁸² The clergy at St. Patrick's church may also have played a part in the situation. But, in any case, Henry no longer had a home.

The Mission of Our Lady of Mercy represented a well-established aspect of Chicago life by the time Henry came to live there, sometime around 1900.⁸³ The Home was founded by the Catholic Archdiocese in 1877, as a residence and place of refuge for homeless boys. Since selling papers on downtown streets was one of the means by which orphaned or abandoned boys survived in large cities, the Mission became known unofficially as "the News Boys' Home," and that is what Henry called it.

The building in which Henry lived, and which he describes in some detail, had been purchased by the Mission in 1889, by the then director Father D. S. A. Mahony (1. 5).

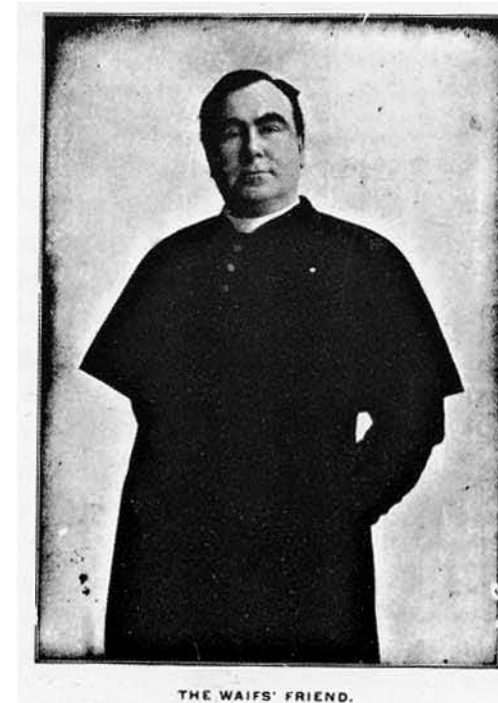
*The buildings which we occupy at present are only dwelling houses which were on the property when it was purchased. They have been remodeled and adapted as far as possible to our needs ... For the comfort and benefit of the boys, a laundry, toilet and bathrooms, lavatory, clothes-room, play-room, and hall were fitted up.*⁸⁴

Father Dennis Mahony served as director from 1889 to 1906, throughout the time of Henry's stay at the Home (1. 6). He was familiar to Henry by a somewhat different name, "Father Meaney," a nickname by which he was known to several generations of boys.⁸⁵ Darger also refers to Father O'Hara, another priest who was present in the Home at that time, as assistant to Father Mahony.⁸⁶

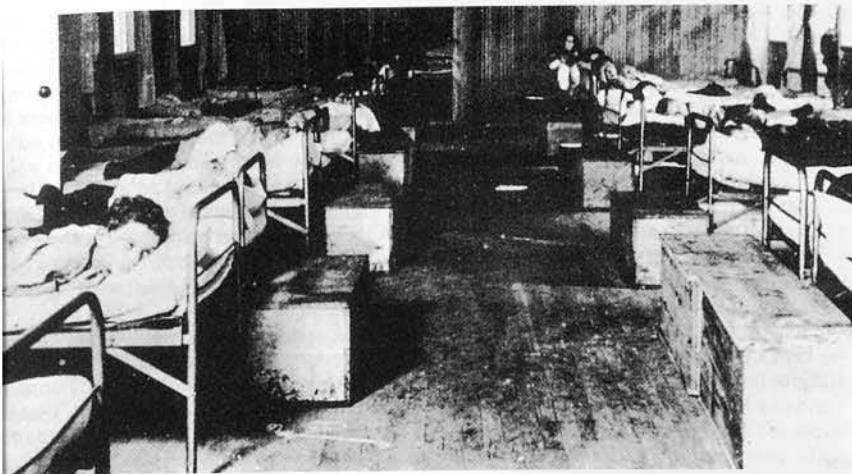
At the time of Darger's stay, the institution cared for from five to six hundred children annually. "Some stay only a short time, and others remain a few years, or until they have become self-supporting."⁸⁷ The Mission operated its own publishing business, both as a source of income for the institution, and as a means of providing vocational training for the older boys. At about the time of Darger's arrival at the Home, its presses had also begun to produce two small magazines which described the lives of the boys, both in the institution and before their arrival, *The Waifs' Messenger* (1900) and *The Waifs' Annual* (1901). These periodicals are of particular value to us, in that they provide a detailed picture of the boys' life in the Home. It is possible that Darger's later interest in writing and the making of books could, in part, have been inspired by his awareness of the publishing activities going on around him.



1.5 left
The Mission of Our Lady of Mercy, exterior. Reproduced, by permission, from *The Waifs' Annual*.



1.6 left
Father Dennis Mahony. "The Waif's Friend." Reproduced, by permission, from *The Waifs' Annual*.



Darger's account of life in the News Boys' Home, a child's-eye view written some seventy years later, naturally differs considerably from the accomplishments of the institution as they were described by the adults who ran it:

*The institution saved thousands of homeless boys from perversion of faith and from temptations that had surrounded them. It aided them toward the attainment of Christian manhood. It rendered them honest, capable and self-supporting.*⁸⁸

Henry may have experienced his most intense exposure to Catholic ideals and dogma during this brief period of his life when he was living in what was a profoundly Catholic environment.

However, given the character and experience of the boys who the Mission was created to serve, tough, streetwise urchins capable of surviving on their own in a rough and uncaring city, it is probable that Henry found himself outclassed, an overprotected innocent among hardened survivors of the streets. In terms of the Home's proven ability to cope with difficult and even delinquent children, it is all the more surprising that they proved incapable of dealing with Henry, or of forcing him to conform.

1.7 upper
The Mission of Our Lady of Mercy, the Boys' Sleeping Room. Reproduced, by permission, from *The Waifs' Annual*.

1.8
The Mission of Our Lady of Mercy, the Dining Room. Reproduced, by permission, from *The Waifs' Annual*.



In writing about the News Boys' Home years later, Darger visualized it in remarkably concrete terms [1. 7 and 1. 8].

The mission of our Lady of Mercy building was four stories high, had a steep slanting roof which leaked a while during storms. The top floor under that roof was our large sleeping room. I never knew how many boys there were, but there were not many ... Our building was 50 feet wide, and the windows seven feet high. The dining room was on the ground floor and the meals were good.⁸⁹

Concealed behind such passages of architectural description are unspoken depths of emotion. Only the reference to occasional storms suggests the intensity of the confusion and anxiety that Henry was experiencing beneath this new roof. Removed from the unusual intimacy of his life with his father, he was plunged, unprepared, into group living with other boys. Years later, writing of the situation in which he found himself, Darger constructed a sentence which betrays his confusion and sense of guilt at having failed his father. "The boys there all had parents, but could not take care of them."⁹⁰ He understood, on the other hand, that he himself still needed to be taken care of, and that there was no other choice. "If I knew where to go to be elsewhere taken care of I would have surely run away."⁹¹ This theme, of "running away," would recur frequently in the years to come. While it is a fantasy shared by all children in institutions, it may have had special meaning for Darger, whose elaborate other world provided a constant possibility of removing himself from environments and life situations which he was unable to relate to, allowing him to escape to places which conformed more closely to his internal needs.

It is unclear how long Darger remained at the News Boys' Home. "I do not remember the length of time or years I remained there in the mission of our Lady's Home."⁹² His inability to keep track of those years may derive from the fact that he never quite accepted the permanence of the change in his life situation, expecting always to be rescued by his father and taken home.

My father came to see me during my stay there often, in the winter and the summer, and especially on the Fourth of July and Christmas. My Godmother also came often to see me.⁹³

On one occasion his father did make a feeble attempt to reclaim his son.

My father brought some woman relative to have me adopted by her, but Father Meaney was not there at the time, and Father O'Hara could not do anything about it. My father would have to see him. He never did. My father never came with her again. I had heard Father Meaney without court order could not grant him the request.⁹⁴

As we have seen, in situations of pure fantasy, Darger could betray the anger and frustration he felt at his father's inability to protect and care for his family. In a letter included in *The Realms of the Unreal*, and addressed to an imaginary general, Jack Evans, two detectives request assistance in locating a General Henry J. Darger. Because father and son shared the same name, it was possible

for Henry to make serious accusations, while obscuring precisely who they refer to. In this letter we observe for the first time the astonishing manipulation of reality in the service of unrestrained fantasy, the displacement of historical facts from one world to another.

It was not long after this that general Jack Evans himself received this note from a strange mysterious place; "It is requested that your excellency general Jack Evans, will look into the affair of said general Henry J. Darger that worked at St. Joseph's Hospital Abbieannia about seven years ago, whose wife died leaving him two little babies which through his foolish grief he has neglected and left them at your institution. They are as we have found out two little girl children of pretty style, and we advise you to notify the Sister Superior at St. Joseph's Hospital in Pandora, Abbieannia and see to it that he is made to take them back which if he will refuse, and returns them we'll see to his immediate arrest. If you do not know the children he does and you had better see to it that he sends for them, for he can describe them as he has their pictures. We are two detectives who are writing this. We'll give him about two months to recall them or he will go before the court."

—Detectives Fox and West.⁹⁵

The reference to a Henry J. Darger who had worked at St. Joseph's Hospital is an allusion to Darger himself, not to his father. However, since Henry never married, the Darger who abandoned his two infant children, allowing them to be placed in an institution, is clearly Henry J. Darger, Sr., his father. The explanation that he neglected the two babies left to him because of his grief over the death of his wife is dismissed as "foolish." He is to be punished in a court of law if he doesn't reclaim his children. Puzzling, even in the context of fantasy, is the discovery that they are "two little girl children of pretty style," and not a boy and a girl. Perhaps this slight shift in reality was needed so that the terrible accusations contained in the letter would refer less directly to Henry's own abandonment. However, as we delve more deeply into his psyche, we will discover the overwhelming intensity of his identification with his lost sister; the two abandoned children merging in the fictional personality of the murdered Annie Aronburg, whose picture Darger once possessed.⁹⁶

1.9

The Skinner Elementary School, 1903. Reproduced by permission of the Chicago Historical Society.



DARGER'S ACCOUNT of day-to-day events in the Home makes it evident that he experienced a lot of difficulty in adapting to the rough and tumble of life with other boys. He seems to have been unaware of the politics of group living; he was constantly in trouble, and unable to establish meaningful relationships with anyone.

What boys were not allowed to do there, was climb to the top of their clothes lockers as they were called. I told, was forced to tell on them once when they did so, and after that, they and even prime Mrs. Gannon were sore at me, and some of the bigger boys told me plenty. They did not hit me though. I never did that again.⁹⁷

While Henry doesn't appear to have found friends, or to have related strongly to other children, certain boys seem to have entered his consciousness in surprising ways. Perhaps the most important of these "personalities" was John Manley.

There was one boy who was somewhat friendly and sometimes not. When he got angry at you, you knew it. He was not a bully though, nor tried to be. But at times he was a snitcher. His name was John Manley ... He wanted my company and friendship, but was hot tempered and aggressive, and I did my best to try and avoid him. He wanted my company but was bossy. He wanted my company always for sure I'll say again, but when I don't like anyone I wanted him to stay away. He would not do so.⁹⁸

John Manley's determination and its "stuck record" echo in Darger's consciousness, and though a friendship doesn't seem to have resulted, he occupied a position of considerable prestige in Henry's other world. The Manleys, father and two sons, were the generals in charge of the evil Glan-delinians. John Manley was to play a powerful role, as one of the leading enemies of God, in the Realms of the Unreal.⁹⁹

IN MOVING TO THE NEWS BOYS' HOME, Darger was also forced to change schools. "At that time being in the home, I was sent during the days to a city public school called the Skinner ... We were sent there for it was way too far from any Catholic School."¹⁰⁰ [1.9]. The shift to a non-parochial school may have been confusing to Darger, but it doesn't appear to have interfered with his academic performance or his ability to relate to teachers.¹⁰¹ One teacher lingered in his memory, Mrs. Dewey. They seem to have shared an interest in the Civil War, a conflict about which Henry claimed considerable knowledge.

I once told my teacher, but the one, Mrs. Dewey at the Skinner school, that I believed no one truthfully knew the losses in the battles of wars (including our Civil war); because each history told different losses, and I had the histories and other stories to prove it, and let her see and go over them. I had three histories that told different losses at the civil war battles, including Pittsburg Landing, Antetam Run No 2, Gettysburg, and so on, and it is true. Some claim Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing was the wars bloodiest with 24,000 dead in the two day battle. I don't care what you might say, but I firmly don't believe it.¹⁰²

This incident not only demonstrates young Darger's astonishing grasp of historical research, and his unusual knowledge of the American Civil War, but it serves to reveal conclusively the healthy functioning of his intellect. Whatever the nature of the problems that were surfacing at this time, it is absolutely clear that he was not mentally retarded. "I a feeble minded kid ... I knew more than the whole shebang in that place."¹⁰³

But, problems were surfacing. The strain of adapting to life with other children, both in the Home and at a new school, was making itself very apparent. While signs of emotional disturbance and of delinquency may first have appeared during the period of his life with his father, clear symptoms of psychological illness now manifested themselves in his behavior and in his relationship with other children at the Home and at school. He seems to have been both desperate and confused.

At the beginning of my first term at the Skinner school ... I was good and studious, but not meaning any harm or wrong, I was a little too funny and made strange noises with my mouth, nose and throat in my classroom to the great annoyance of all the other boys and girls. And I thought they would think it funny, and laugh or giggle. But they gave me saucy and hateful looks. Some said if I did not stop it, they'd gang up on at me after school and gave me the dirtiest looks. I defied them. After several months of it, it caused my expulsion from school.¹⁰⁴

Although Henry managed, with the assistance of Father Meaney, to be readmitted to school, his strange behavior continued to excite comment, despite his serious attempts to control himself. Describing a meeting with the principal of the Skinner School, Darger admits that he didn't really know what all the fuss was about.

But she told me very sharply and angrily that if I ever did that again I would be expelled for good. As I truly forgot and did not remember, what I had done wrong, I did not really know what she was scolding me for so sharply. I would have told her off, but Father Meaney warned me with a sharp look to be careful. But nevertheless I was returned to school, and I was so unusually changed. I remembered still not what I had done out of the way the first time at school, but believe me and heaven knows, I was now one of the best behaving boys in school.¹⁰⁵

It is probable that Henry had very little control over the various sounds and gestures (tics) that he was the source of. One gesture in particular seems to have been almost completely automatic, and to have been generally recognized as pathological. It is difficult to picture it from Henry's description, although he made reference to it on several occasions. It seems to have originated well before he left home, but it was not recognized as significant until later. "Also in my boyhood days ... I had a very queer way of playing in the snow, by motion of my left hand, which later on got me into serious

trouble."¹⁰⁶ During his life at home, he tells us of a gesture which seems related. "I also loved to splash water at pools left by rain, especially with my hand to pretend it was raining."¹⁰⁷ At the Home this gesturing with his hand was seen as crazy, perhaps because its repetitive nature appeared openly masturbatory.

I was looked on as "Crazy" and also called crazy. Especially for the strange way I threw with my left hand, like pretending it was snowing. Had I known that, I only would have done it where I was not seen. It caused Mrs. Gannon, her son, and Otto Zink and others there who saw me do it, to think I was either feeble minded or actually crazy.¹⁰⁸



1.10

Dr. Otto L. Schmidt. Reproduced from *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago*, Biographical Publishing Corporation (Chicago, 1922). Photograph by Steffens.

DARGER'S ACCOUNT of the worsening situation in which he found himself is, fortunately, not the only description of his symptoms available to us.¹⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, he had little insight, even as an adult, into the nature of his problems. The symptoms he describes don't seem sufficient to explain the drastic decisions that were soon to be made on his behalf.

The adults involved in caring for him were neither inexperienced in evaluating children, nor unduly malicious.¹¹⁰ Observing him over the course of several years, they seem to have become convinced that he was so seriously disturbed that they were unable to keep him in the Home. This lay opinion was seconded by a Chicago physician, Dr. Otto L. Schmidt.¹¹¹ (1. 10)

I was taken several times to be examined by a doctor, who on the second time I came, said my heart was not in the right place. Where was it supposed to be in my belly? Yet I did not receive any kind of medicine or any kind of treatment whatever ... I did not know it at the time, but now I know I was taken to the doctor to find out if I was really feeble-minded or crazy. He said nothing about that especially in my presence. Had I known what was going to be done with me I surely would have run away.¹¹²

It is essential to remember that this clinical assessment was taking place shortly after the turn of the century. Few diagnostic categories were in use, especially with regard to the psychological difficulties of children. A wide range of psychiatric illnesses, and symptom constellations, would simply have been classed under the heading "feeble-minded."¹¹³

The discovery of the application form for admission to the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, filled out for Henry by his father and the physician, has supplied a few new details concerning the reasons for his confinement in this psychiatric facility. A number of inaccuracies in the information suggest that Darger senior's memory was poor. We do learn that Henry was breastfed. "Was the child nursed by the mother?" "Yes. Nursed by mother 5 months." We are also told that Henry had had the typical childhood diseases of the period, "typhoid, measles, and mumps." Asked, "What correction if any is used at home?", Henry's father replied, "whipped."

Significantly, almost every question attempting to get at mental abnormality is answered in the negative, with the result that Henry emerges on the form as a perfectly healthy boy. Only one fact is stressed again and again. "At what age and in what manner was any peculiarity first manifested?" "Self abuse from six years." "Is the child very nervous?" "Yes." "State any peculiar habits the child may have." "Self abuse." "Is the child given to self abuse or has it ever been?" "Yes." "What cause has been assigned for its mental deficiency?" "Self abuse." "Is it considered congenital or acquired?" "Acquired." "Is the child insane, or has it been pronounced insane by a physician?" "Yes."

The circular argument much used in psychiatric diagnosis at the turn of the century is being employed here in its classical form: masturbation leads to insanity. The individual is masturbating, therefore he is insane. The cause of the insanity? Masturbation. The possibility of a hereditary taint was also explored, without result. "Were there ever any cases of epilepsy or insanity in the family of the father?" "No." "Were there ever any cases of epilepsy or insanity in the family of the mother?" "No. Grandmother on mother's side had fainting spells." We do learn, however, that at the time of Henry's admission to the asylum, his father had already entered the home for the aged on Sheffield Avenue run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. "Are the parents able to pay for necessary clothing for child and furnish the transportation?" "No. Father is kept by charity. No friends." Darger senior's signature on the application form is remarkably shaky, with all the information on the form filled out by the doctor.

It is unlikely that Dr. Otto Schmidt, the physician who assessed Henry's mental state, had any specialized training in psychiatry.¹¹⁴ He may simply have gone along with the wishes of the staff at the News Boys' Home to rid themselves of a child whose behavior had become problematic or distasteful. The result for Darger was catastrophic.

... during a cold windy threatening late November day, (I know not the day or date of the month) I was hustled unto the Chicago and Alton Limited train, and brought to some kind of home for feeble-minded children outside of and south of the small city of Lincoln, Illinois.¹¹⁵

The Asylum

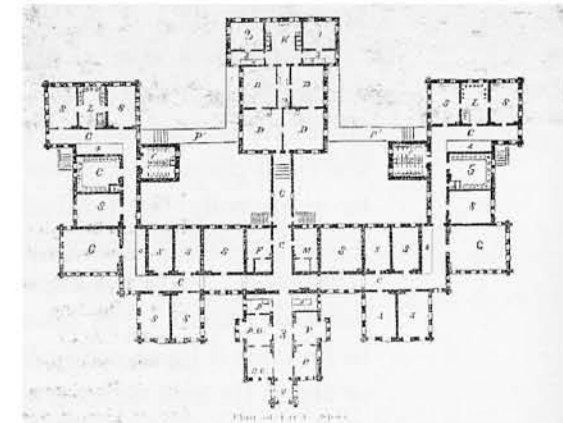
1904–9

If the only knowledge we had about Darger as a young man was that provided by his autobiography, there might be a tendency to see all that was happening to him as a tragic misunderstanding. To some extent it was, in that the institutions in which he found himself were absolutely unsuited to his developmental needs. Given the nature of turn-of-the-century clinical facilities for children, this was inevitable. Having said this, it still seems unlikely that his failure to mature in many areas of psychological and social functioning can be exclusively attributed to his environment.

The Henry Darger we are coming to know, as it were from the outside, can be seen and understood partly as the product of institutions: the News Boys' Home; the various Chicago hospitals in which he was to work during the whole of his laboring life; and most important, the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, in which he spent most of his youth.¹¹⁶ Of all the institutions in which he lived or worked, it was this one which left the deepest traces on his character and on his sense of self, especially that carefully circumscribed outer self which he allowed others to see.

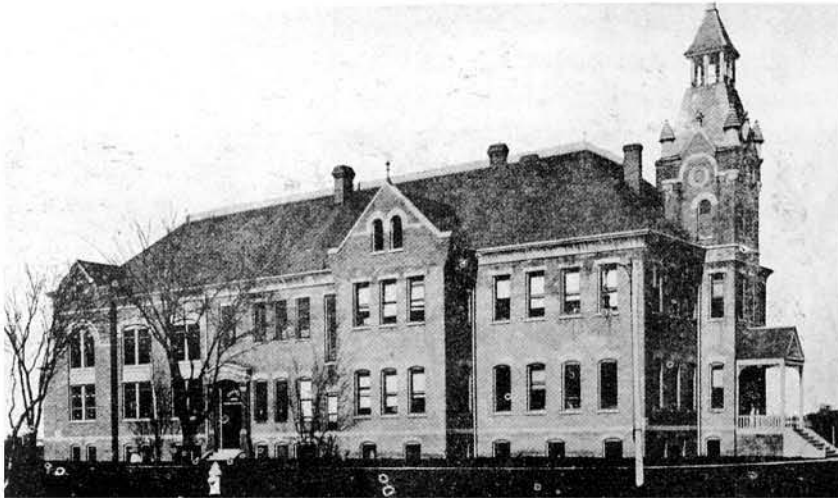
A huge self-contained world, this asylum community on the edge of town, with its 1,200 mentally handicapped inmates, and its staff of over 500 employees, was systematically cut off from external reality. Obedient to its own rules and routines, it was an enclosed and protected environment, strangely tolerant of the different, the limited, the childlike, and the deformed. In this unchanging and timeless world, children did not grow up, and did, indeed, remain young always.

In that Darger ultimately chose to run away from this safe and undemanding situation, he demonstrated that he did not belong. Nevertheless, institutional life had exerted its effect during the years of his adolescence and young manhood, when so many aspects of his personality and intellect were taking shape, and its influence on him was profound and permanent. This remained particularly evident in regard to the social side of his development, that part of his character that was shaped through the very limited possibilities of interaction with others typical of such an institution. His childlike and essentially passive response to authority, characterized by ambivalence and occasional explosions of rage, was clearly dictated by early experiences of helplessness and submission. Precisely because of its formative influence, it is necessary that we inquire into the goals and functioning of this institution shortly after the turn of the century when Darger was living within its walls (November 28, 1904–July 23, 1909).¹¹⁷



1.11

The Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, Main Building. Photograph and plan reproduced by permission of the Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln, Illinois.



1.12

The Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, School and Chapel Building. Reproduced by permission of the Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln, Illinois.

The institution that was to become the Lincoln Asylum had actually originated in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1865, as an educational facility for the mentally handicapped children of the state.¹¹⁸ At the time of its founding it was conceived of not as a custodial institution for the profoundly retarded, but rather as "an experimental school for idiots and feeble-minded children."

*The design and object of the asylum are not of custodial character, but to furnish the means of education to that portion of the youth of the state not provided for in any of its other educational institutions, who are of a proper school-attending age, and who shall remain such periods of time as shall, in the estimate of the superintendent and board of trustees, suffice to impart all the education practicable in each particular case, and, in conformity with the regulations of the asylum, children between the ages of ten and eighteen, who are feeble minded, or so deficient in intelligence as to be incapable of being educated at an ordinary school, and who are not epileptic, insane, or greatly deformed, may be admitted by the superintendent.*¹¹⁹

In accordance with its initial goals, the new facility was incorporated as the Illinois Institute for the Education of Feeble-Minded Children. However, from the beginning pressure was brought to bear to force the acceptance of more seriously impaired and disturbed children, with the result that overcrowding with more profoundly retarded inmates soon began to undermine its experimental educational aims. Children from Illinois were admitted free of charge, a fact that also encouraged the rapid growth of the institution.

In 1875 the decision was made to change the name of the facility and to move it into the countryside outside of Lincoln, Illinois. It opened at this new location in September 1877, as the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children. To Henry it was to be simply "the asylum." The specially designed building erected in 1875-77, and known as "the Main Building," was later to be Darger's home (1. 11).

*The building so erected was of brick and consisted of a center, three stories in height, with basement and attic, connecting wings of two stories in height, and extreme wings parallel with the center, also three stories in height. The general style of architecture is modern Gothic, with slate roof, stone trimmings, dormer windows and towers ... The building faces to the east, fronting on State street. Its extreme length is 395 feet; extreme depth, 215 feet; depth of wings, 165 feet. The tower of the center building has an elevation of 100 feet, and those on the wings 85 feet.*¹²⁰

The boys were housed in the North wing, and carefully secluded from the girls. By the time Darger arrived, twenty-five years later, the asylum had grown very much larger. Nevertheless, it was in this wing that the better-functioning boys such as Henry continued to live. In 1890 a "custodial building" had been erected to house severely retarded patients. Then, in 1897, "a handsome school and chapel was built, two stories in height with a high basement and an imposing tower in front."¹²¹ This was the school, across the street from the main building, which Henry was to attend (1.12).

The population of the asylum was now growing uncontrollably, with enormous waiting lists of children whose parents wished to have them admitted. Typically, as these institutions grew larger and less discriminating in terms of the kinds of cases admitted, their original idealism evaporated, and they became vast warehouses of neglected inmates. By 1889, "criminals, paupers, the mentally ill, and more and more severely retarded people were coming in large numbers from county almshouses."¹²² Once admitted few inmates ever left. "In 1899, the Legislature appropriated funds for the erection of Boys' and Girls' Cottages, which resulted in doubling the capacity of the institution."¹²³ In a report written shortly after Darger's departure from this place which he had come to call home, the asylum is described as "one of the largest institutions of its kind in the world, [housing] about 1200 inmates."¹²⁴ The staff needed to care for this huge population of helpless children had by then grown to comprise some 534 individuals.¹²⁵

On the basis of his own report, it appears that Darger was relatively happy and content in the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, and there is no evidence that he felt his permanent commitment there to be a mistake. "Finally I got to like the place and the meals were good and plenty."¹²⁶ He fit into its routines without difficulty, was probably accepted as one of the better inmates by the staff, and made special friends among the boys he lived with. He was now tougher and more easily able to hold his own. There was no more talk of uncontrolled sounds and gestures, and no further bizarre symptoms are mentioned. We must bear in mind, however, that in an institution such as this one, with a population of around

1,200 profoundly mentally and psychologically impaired children, Darger would have stood out as a model of psychological health, his symptoms reduced to insignificance in a world of gross psychopathology.

He seems to have been grouped with boys who functioned at a relatively high level, and he was expected to attend the asylum school. Nevertheless, given his unusual intelligence, he can't have been much challenged by his environment. With any expectation that he develop intellectually or emotionally removed, and in the absence of appropriate developmental models and demands, he may well have grown increasingly unsuited to life in the outside world, and incapable of relating with normal adults in a mature manner. This would only have become evident after he left the institution, and began to attempt to earn his living and to function on his own in Chicago.

After so many years, it is all but impossible to determine the extent to which Darger's psychological state as an adult can be seen as the result of an adolescence spent in a totally unsuitable institutional environment, or as evidence of innate pathological processes which would have distorted his development in whatever environment he found himself. In the absence of truly informative diagnostic records from the institution, the evidence simply doesn't exist to make such a distinction. All that we can say with certainty is that by the time he emerged from the asylum, at the age of seventeen, all possibility of normal maturation in many important areas of his life had simply ceased to exist.

DARGER PRESERVED accurate and detailed memories of his life in the asylum. "I believe I was at the asylum for 7 years and during the summers between that time on the farm."¹²⁷ His description of his environment is sufficiently specific to allow us to recognize the institution in its early days.

There was a sort of park like grounds south and extending west north and south of the asylum where we boys had our recreation during summertime ... That building had two sections, one for girls and one for boys. It had a tall rounded fire escape on the east side which we boys often for fire drill slid down on the inside. I had heard there were at times 1500 children there.¹²⁸ The head man was a profession Doctor and Surgeon whose name was Doctor Caldwell ... The school building as I wrote before was over two hundred feet north of the asylum. There was an underground tunnel leading to it from the asylum to be used only in bad weather.¹²⁹

There is a curious timelessness about Henry's description of life in the asylum. It is as though nothing ever changed, with an endlessly recurring routine repeated day after day, year after year. Only the weather in this more or less rural setting seems to have provided for possibilities of excitement and change.

My stay there was for some good number of years and was uneventful but busy, except for my schooling and interest in big summer and winter storms.¹³⁰

We all retired to bed at eight o'clock in the evening, got up at six AM in the morning and went to school across from the asylum.¹³¹

FROM ITS ORIGIN in 1865, a significant goal of the new institution was to find experimental means to educate its all but ineducable children. While some of these idealistic intentions soon fell by the wayside overwhelmed by reality, an effort continued to be made to educate the better-functioning children. In 1878, a year after the opening of the Main Building in Lincoln, we are told:

*The education furnished by the institution will include not only the simpler elements of instruction usually taught in common schools, where that is practicable, but will embrace a course of training in the more practical matters of every-day life, the cultivation of habits of decency, propriety, self-reliance, and the development and enlargement of a capacity for useful occupation.*¹³²

At various times, experimental programs in shoe-making, knitting-machine operation, farming and gardening, brass work, and wood carving were introduced. Some effort was made to classify the children in terms of intellectual ability, and an attempt was made to provide at least basic classroom skills for the few children able to learn such things. "School rooms are provided for such children as are capable of school training, and children are graded according to their mental capacity."¹³³

Although Darger says nothing at all about the quality of education offered to him in the asylum school, or the nature of teaching activities there, he does mention one of his teachers, Miss Duff, as well as the fact that there was a lady principal.¹³⁴ In the later years of his stay, some twenty-eight female teachers were employed in various capacities, as well as two librarians.

*A very important feature of the institution is its schools. What is ordinarily called "book learning" is found not to be well adapted to the needs of the feeble-minded inmates, and the educational course had been made more practical, while manual training and music have been introduced. Expert teachers are provided to teach the special branches. The School proper consists of kindergarten, arts, manual training, physical culture, phonetic drill and music. In the manual training department many kinds of manual work are taught, including clay modeling, basketry, needle-work, cardboard construction, reed, raffia, sloyd [wood carving] and Venetian iron work ... The institution has an excellent orchestra, the members composing it being inmates of the school.*¹³⁵

Allowing for the exaggerated idealism typical of these descriptions of asylum aims and activities written by the administration, it would seem that Darger may have been exposed to some educational activity, to at least occasional children's books, and to various arts and crafts. Perhaps his surprising skills as a watercolorist familiar with the application of graded washes was acquired from one of the lady teachers who had recognized his extraordinary interest and ability.¹³⁶

Henry never claimed to have had any high school education, and his wide range of knowledge seems to have been acquired later. He did have a rudimentary grasp of punctuation, he could certainly spell, and he possessed an astonishing vocabulary which may have been acquired from reading. These observations are based on evaluations of his academic strengths in later life, since he says absolutely nothing about what went on in the asylum school. His deep love of children's stories, and especially of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* and its various sequels, which made its first appearance in 1900, may possibly owe something to his experience in the asylum school and its library.¹³⁷

It is also possible that his love of narrative owes something to another, less positive side of life in the asylum — the vast quantity of unoccupied time, the many hours spent by inmates in such institutions doing nothing but sitting and waiting. Such unoccupied time and space tends to be filled with fantasy and dreams. The barrenness of life in these vast warehouses, the utter lack of stimulation, of color, of meaningful activity, the endless sameness as day follows day, inevitably awakens fantasy in a mind capable of imaginative activity.

An interesting parallel to Darger's *The History of My Life* is provided by Clifford R. Shaw's *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*. First published in 1930, it is a detailed study of an autobiography written by Stanley, a delinquent boy living in the Chicago of the 1920s.¹³⁸ Stanley's somewhat primitive book described his life in various Chicago institutions for delinquent boys. In his account of life in these institutions, Stanley emphasizes again and again the necessity of daydreaming.

*My only pleasure was in my childish dreams, which carried me away into the free world outside ... I got lonely and sullen and full of fear, but my dreams kept me alive, and I dreamed every day. There I started to be a dreamer of dreams. That is one of life's cynical jokes — how I could dream such beautiful dreams in such a hole of strict discipline and drabness.*¹³⁹

The sole path of escape, the only possibility of freedom in such situations of deprivation, is provided by the mind's powerful capacity to take flight, to indulge in long, interconnected, and elaborate daydreams, the creation over a lifetime of a so-called paracosm.¹⁴⁰ The foundation on which Darger's astonishingly early creative activity rested may paradoxically have been his experience of institutional deprivation.

What is evident is that, at the asylum, he was deprived not only of any really serious possibilities of education, but, as well, of any educational credentials which he could make use of in his later working life. As a result, when he began working, he was restricted to the lowest and least well-paid forms of employment — janitorial positions and dishwashing jobs. Since intelligence testing procedures were not yet in use, his extraordinary intellect was presumably never recognized.

Nevertheless, both in the institution and later, faith in his unusual abilities always provided Henry with the assurance that he was not crazy. Like many people then, and now, he tended to equate mental illness with feeble-mindedness, assuming that if you were crazy, you could no longer know anything or think. Clearly, that was not his case.

WHAT RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY there was for the children seems to have been Protestant in character. No effort was made to provide for the needs of Catholic children, with the result that later in his life Darger had to establish his credentials as a Catholic before he was allowed to partake of Communion.

I was a baptized Catholic but in the asylum, I even then knew all things of the religion, but also in the asylum and on the State Farm they never even for us all showed any kind of religion. They seemed even Godless, even in the school there. The only sign of something like religion was in the asylum's main children's dining room for us when before and after meals the our Father was recited by the dining room matron only ending the prayer in the Protestant way ... Once in a while in

the school hall on the ground floor we were entertained with shows, training exercises, and church meetings or Sunday school on Sunday morning. Those who could sang hymns and recited prayer meeting. The minister never gave any sermons ... I suppose they had the idea that feeble minded could not at all understand religious instruction. Then why were they to go to school?¹⁴¹

Darger says little about adults with whom he came into contact.¹⁴² Only his later obsession with child slavery and with orphanages betrays something of his accumulated rage. Certainly strict discipline and severe physical punishment was typical of such institutions, where adult custodians, only minimally more intelligent than the inmates, were all but unsupervised.

I was not even the talking back kind. I received that sort of training in the "bughouse" asylum as they called it, I would write about. Who ever talked back to a superior there, got the real punishment and how.¹⁴³ ... The one who was over us was a severe stern man by the name of Henry Aurand. For forgetting to make my bed once he sure boxed my ears. That made me his enemy for life but yet otherwise I behaved so well that he had no real occasion to punish me further.¹⁴⁴

If we had only Henry's account of life in the Lincoln Asylum in those years, combined with the idealized descriptions of the institution supplied by its various directors, we would have little reason to see it as a particularly violent or dangerous place. However, another source of information exists, a source that provides a far more detailed

and accurate portrayal of life in the asylum while Henry was resident there. The picture it provides of day-to-day conditions is terrible indeed. On January 14, 1908, as a result of a series of tragic events involving some of the children confined in the Lincoln Asylum, a Special Investigating Committee of the State of Illinois General Assembly was constituted to hold formal hearings concerning conditions in this state institution. The results of these hearings were published as a report of the Special Investigating Committee.¹⁴⁵ It contains over one thousand pages of testimony, with the verbatim accounts of forty-two witnesses. On the basis of this truly terrifying portrayal of the reality of life at the asylum, it is now possible to establish far more elaborate, detailed, and specific connections between Henry's existence there and its later disguised portrayal in *In the Realms of the Unreal* (see chapter 10).

WHAT IS MISSING entirely from Henry's account of his life in the asylum is the slightest sign of human warmth or concern from an adult. Although he mentions the names of various individuals, he does not imply that anyone took any interest in him as a human being, and no one seems to have recognized that he was extraordinarily intelligent, undoubtedly misdiagnosed, and almost certainly in the wrong institution. No one ever appears to have questioned his permanent residence in the asylum, or to have considered the possibility of his release.¹⁴⁶

It was among the other children that he found friends and achieved a certain status, something that he was never to manage to the same extent again. "I being among all those boys in that section and yet got along with them all fine."¹⁴⁷ As in all such institutions for boys it was necessary to fight your way to acceptance and recognition. The News Boys' Home seems to have prepared him for holding his own.

During my earliest time there there were two boys there by the names of George Hamilton and John Johnston, whose character who was that no punishment of any kind would change them. It only made them far worse. One morning when us boys were in what is called the "playroom" Johnnie Johnston, known as the most bad of the boys, teased or tormented me. At that time I was suffering from a very severe toothache. The pain and his torment of me roused me to an awful fury. I went at him so savagely, that afterwards he never even dared to come near me again.¹⁴⁸

Able to fight, he was also able to make friends.

Among all the boys in my section I had only a few special friends, Jacob Marcus, Paul Marcus (no brother of the first mentioned) Daniel Jones, and Donald Aurand.¹⁴⁹

My special friend was Daniel Jones, we were great pals.¹⁵⁰

Henry passed through puberty and adolescence while in the asylum, and there is at least a trace of this process of change in his account of his life at this time. He seems to have been at least mini-

mally aware of the different sexes, although boys and girls were kept apart in the institution, though not perhaps in the school.

There was a head boy in charge of us by the name of Whilliam O'Neil. He was all right but sometimes imperious. Whilliam Thomas O'Neil was the best looking boy I have ever seen. He was no bully or exactly bossy, but being set over us by the administrator, we had to obey him and do his bidding. If you did you and he got along fine.¹⁵¹

Darger's adolescent experience of little girls seems to have been far more limited, reflecting rumors and talk on the part of the boys more than real contact. His early interest in girl children, and his later obsession with them, does not make itself felt in these years. Nevertheless, one girl left a mark in his consciousness which ensured her fame as a character of importance in the fantasy world of the Realms.

There was a little girl there by the name of Jennie Turner. I thought I could be attracted to her, but when I learned from others of her disposition I kept away from her. I had my doubts for a while thinking they wanted her for themselves and lied to me. The truth was heaven help any man that when she grows up marry her. She was a wildcat and let you know it.¹⁵²

Jennie Turner, transferred to the Realms and renamed Jennie Turmer, was to remain a little girl always. The threat implicit in her growing up was thereby avoided.

The State Farm and Henry's Escape

*The institution controls a farm of 450 acres owned by the state and about 400 acres leased for a term of years. The farm is located about a mile from the institution, south of Salt Creek. About 50 boys are kept at work upon this farm.*¹⁵³ [1.13]

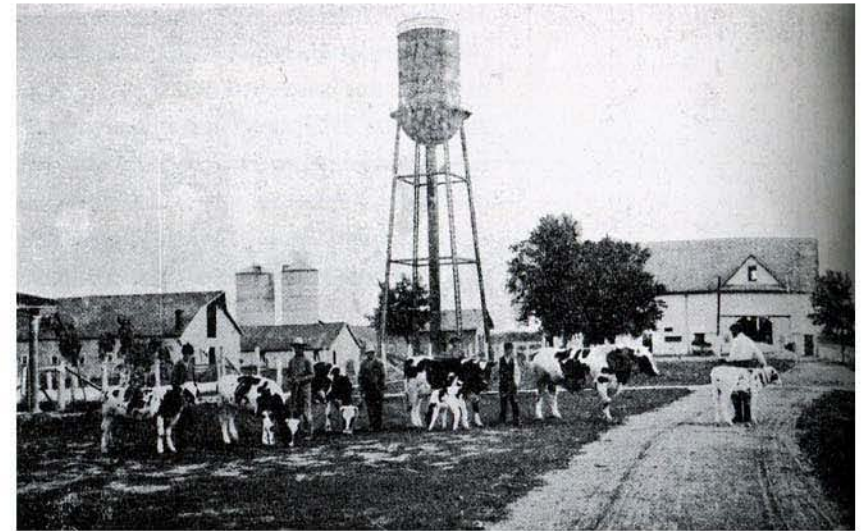
During the summers Henry was sent with other less seriously disturbed boys to work at a state-owned farm.¹⁵⁴ Working on farms was seen as beneficial, and was also used in attempting to reform delinquent boys. Although he liked the experience of working and living on a farm, Henry had become curiously overdependent on the asylum, and unable to adapt easily to any change which threatened his attachment to that secure environment he now considered "home."

When I was somewhat older, probably in my earliest teens, I was put with a company of boys of apparently the same age to go and work on what was called the State Farm. It was three and a half miles from the asylum.¹⁵⁵ ... The work was not hard we quit at four in the afternoon, started at eight in the morning, after milking the cows, and off again at four. We were off on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. We had our baths on Saturdays before dinner.¹⁵⁶ I loved to work in the fields. We worked on the farm only in summertime. During our working days we slept in a large place called the dormitory.¹⁵⁷ At the approach of late fall we

were returned to the asylum which Mr. Allenberger "termed" the bughouse. I loved it much better than the farm, but yet I loved the work there. Yet the asylum was home to me.¹⁵⁸

For a boy raised entirely in Chicago, the experience of life in the country would have made a deep impression. Because of Darger's intense response to weather and the sky, this new environment must have been profoundly moving and exciting. It was to serve him well in later years when he often portrayed the countryside and farms in his vast landscape compositions. In the paintings, he clearly depicts the vast expanse of the relatively flat countryside around Lincoln, where one can see for miles out to the far distant horizon. Inevitably, the moving sky fills most of the scene, while on the strip of land below only occasional clumps of trees, usually grouped around a farmhouse and barn, stand out [1.14].

Shortly before Henry's arrival at the asylum, a most impressive meteorological event had occurred, the Easter Day cyclone of April 12, 1903. This unusually violent storm hit East Lincoln Township with tremendous force, and accounts of it seem to have left an indelible impression in his mind, though he was not living there at the time of its occurrence, and it is not mentioned by him in the autobiographical section of *The Life*. The enormous impression made by descriptions of this tornado could have been intensified by the fact that it had occurred on his birthday.¹⁵⁹



1.13
The Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, the State Farm. Reproduced by permission of the Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln, Illinois.



1.14
Henry Darger
Their true character was discovered, but when the Glandelinians were taking them to the camp in an auto the machine got troublesome, and this enabled the little girls to easily get away. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

This storm may have contributed to Darger's conception of the Easter Sunday Twister which monopolizes the remaining 5,000 pages of *The History of My Life*, although the essential model for that event is likely to have been the great Tri-State Tornado of March 18, 1925. The twister, called "Sweetie Pie," which Darger describes as "fictional," occurs on August 15, 1913, decimating a number of, for the most part imaginary, towns in Illinois. Its eruption in his final work, where it completely overwhelms his attempt to write about himself, may indicate the forceful impact of descriptions of the cyclone on the twelve-year-old boy. Again and again, he describes its hideous tongue reaching down with terrible destructive force to touch the earth. And indeed, the funnel of the tornado was overwhelmingly impressive to those who saw it that day.

*The storm could be seen forming, from the city of Lincoln, where it resembled a funnel, the lower portion resembling an elephant's trunk, twisting about in all sorts of contortions, bouncing in the air and then striking earth again.*¹⁶⁰

Darger's description of the great funnel cloud which destroys the "Gleason Asylum" draws, as we will see below (chapter 8), on strikingly different imagery.

Significantly, over fifty years earlier, Darger had begun the writing of *The Realms* with the detailed description of yet another Easter Sunday storm, the Spirian Tearian Typhoon, which struck Pandora, Abbieannia, in 1841, and in which General Hanson Vivian lost his wife and daughter (see p. 413–415). The obvious parallel with events in the life of Darger's father, who also lost his wife and little girl, suggests that these storms, the real one and its fictional successors, carried a heavy burden of subjective meaning which went far beyond the traumatic effect of nature unleashed.

The most impressive natural event which Darger does mention in *The History* was the great winter storm of January 24, 1906. He described it as "the most terrific blizzard storm I have ever seen before and during my lifetime, even now." Writing about it sixty years later, his excitement had not diminished.

I remember the big snowstorms of 1912, March 26 and 27th of 1930, and also before that one of 1918. I've seen here [Chicago] also two other big ones, including last January 26, but believe me or not that one when I was at Lincoln, Ill. had them all put together beat. It raged all day, all night, and till late afternoon the next day and so thick you could not see a hundred feet away. But strange, unlike most awfully big blizzards, it had no very strong wind, and was off the straight north. As I read in papers, Chicago, and all the other middle west cities and towns had the worst

traffic tie up I ever imagined. At Lincoln too was a perfect standstill of traffic, and it looked bad for us inmates for food and fuel for a time. But we got by. I would not want to see a blizzard like that again ... The storm was on January 24, 1906. It got terrible cold after the storm to add to the misery caused by it. I had read the worse blizzards of all come if they happen to follow a freeze rain, which fortunately seldom happens. The freeze rain was on the night of the 22 and morning of the 23. The blizzard was on the 24 and 25th.¹⁶¹

Without the taste of open space and freedom which the State Farm provided, it is doubtful that Henry would ever have attempted to escape from the asylum. Given the permanent nature of commitments to asylums, typical of the early part of this century, it is unlikely that he would ever have been released in any other way.¹⁶²

... but still I don't know why but I did object to leaving the home [to go to the farm]. But as they say so you had to. As will be written later that was the cause of me running away two summers later.¹⁶³

The other and perhaps more important cause was the death of Henry's father on March 1, 1908. He died, at the age of sixty-nine, in the home for the aged run by the Little Sisters of the Poor.¹⁶⁴ During his years in the asylum, Henry never saw his father, and heard from him but rarely. Initially he was lonely and terribly aware of the distance which lay between them.

I was now one hundred and sixty two miles from Chicago and my father.¹⁶⁵

I wrote letters to him, received once in a while Catholic prayer books, and a musical harp. But I did not know how to play it or had anyone to learn it to me.¹⁶⁶

The news of his father's death, when he was sixteen, seems to have affected him profoundly, undermining his attachment to the institution and redirecting his thoughts toward Chicago. The disappearance of any possibility of rescue by his father may have inspired him to accept responsibility for his own salvation.

While back at the home I received a severe shock. I got the bad news that my father died at the St. Augustine Home. I did not cry or weep however. I had the kind of deep sorrow that bad as you feel I could not. I'd been better off if I could have. I was in that state for weeks, and because of it I was in a state of ugliness of such nature that everyone avoided me, they were so scared. Even when back on the farm the next summer they noticed a change in me. They heard the sad news however and did not bother me. During the first of my grief I hardly ate anything,

and was no friend to anyone. I was even dangerous if not left alone.¹⁶⁷

The process of mourning, which does not seem to have been particularly neurotic, did apparently stimulate some kind of growth and a longing for independence. That summer (1908), Henry began a series of attempts to escape. "During the early summer of the fourth year, it was in June, I made my first attempt to run away." While this attempt ended almost immediately in failure, the next attempt was more successful.¹⁶⁸

I with another boy hitch-hiked a freight. He got off at Joliet where he lived, I rode on to Chicago. After a storm I foolishly gave myself up to the police who had me sent back. I stayed there again for more than a year.¹⁶⁹

It would seem that Henry was not yet ready for life on his own. The security offered by the asylum drew him back; indeed it was always to have a curious hold on his memory, even at the end of his life.

I can't say whether I was actually sorry I ran away from the State Farm or not but now I believe I was a sort of fool to have done so. My life was like in a sort of heaven there. Do you think I might be fool enough to run away from heaven if I get there?¹⁷⁰

— obviously the question of an independent spirit prone to running away. At seventeen this longing for independence asserted itself once again, and on this occasion there was no going back. "For doing it the third time the officials of the State Farm would not take me back."¹⁷¹

These periods on the road must have been the freest in Darger's life, with a sense of absolute liberty and space unlike anything he would experience again. Footloose, Henry appears oddly capable, sure of himself, and able to survive and flourish.

During the early summer of the following year, the sixth I believe it was, two boys working on the farm induced me to run away with them. We then got an actual work for a short spell with a German farmer. [When the work ran out] ... we rode on the Illinois Central to Decatur, Ill. I again while there wanted to see Chicago again. You would not believe it, but I then walked from Decatur, Ill. to Chicago arriving early in August. Because of the unusual warm weather and hardly able to sleep I walked also many a night.¹⁷² ... But this hike from Decatur to Chicago was successful. I knew her address so I went and took refuge at my Godmothers ... What made me run away? My protestation of being sent away from the asylum, where I wanted to stay, as for some reason it was home to me.¹⁷³

St. Joseph's Hospital I 1909–22

This is to certify that Mr. Henry Darger is a good willing worker. Was employed at St. Joseph's Hospital from 1909 to 1922.

—Sisters of St. Joseph's Hospital¹⁷⁴

Through the efforts of his godmother, Darger obtained employment as a “floor janitor” at St. Joseph's Hospital in Chicago. This venerable Catholic institution was run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.¹⁷⁵ [1.15] St. Joseph's also provided him with accommodation in its “Workingmen's House.”¹⁷⁶ In that he lived and worked in the hospital, it appears almost as if he had run away from one institution only to find himself living in another. To a considerable extent that was how he perceived and responded to his new situation.

Without being aware of it, he was embarking on a lifetime of poorly paid labor in a series of Chicago hospitals; fifty-four years of dull, frustrating, and unrewarding toil. He would always remain a laborer, doing the hardest and dirtiest jobs. Kept in the background, he was removed from any contact with patients or the public. During the course of over half a century, he changed his place of employment four times: St. Joseph's Hospital (1909–22),¹⁷⁷ Grant Hospital (1922–28),¹⁷⁸ St. Joseph's Hospital again (1928–47), and Alexian Brothers Hospital (1947–63). He was seventeen when he began to work, and seventy-one when he retired.

During the whole of this long span of time, and despite shifts from one hospital to another, and from one kind of work to another, there was no significant change in his external life — no event stands out. His work offered him no intellectual challenge or opportunity — no possibility of growth. *The History of My Life*, from 1909 on, is a curiously empty autobiography, with few personal events to record — a life seemingly without incident. The years must have flowed past all but unnoticed.

THROUGHOUT HIS WORKING LIFE Darger was treated with soul-destroying condescension. In part this was because the nickname “Crazy” had followed him from the asylum.

Sometime how or other for a time Sister Rose finding out I came from the home of feeble minded children thought I was still crazy. I believed she got the information from Sister Nina ... My Godmother not thinking of the consequences told her. The whole hospital full of persons soon knew. I was then called crazy. I had I believe more brains than all combined. None of them, I found out even knew Geography or History. I did.¹⁷⁹

While this emphatic claim to intellectual superiority may have been justified, Henry nevertheless appeared to others to be “simple.” He was generally understood to be, and treated as if he were, somewhat feeble-minded. Some people were actually afraid of him.

Once in searching for something that got lost from me in a very dark enclosure of the out exit on the ground floor ... I scared some young woman (she was cowardly and timid anyway) out of her wits accidentally. When Sister Rose heard of it, by someone



1.15
St. Joseph's Hospital, exterior. Reproduced from *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago*, Biographical Publishing Corporation (Chicago, 1922).

telling her, she scolded me good, and said she surely believed that I am really crazy ... Several times while scolding me for something, whether I did it or not, she threatened to send me back to the Lincoln asylum."¹⁸⁰

The nuns no doubt prided themselves on providing this former inmate of a home for feeble-minded children with a chance to work in a somewhat sheltered environment. But precisely this self-congratulatory attitude permitted them to exploit his labor at little cost, and to take unthinking advantage of him.¹⁸¹ Used to being ordered around and told what to do, because of his background in institutions, he was for the most part too afraid of authority to object to the way he was treated. He was occasionally the butt of cruel jokes, which led him to withdraw ever deeper into himself. "One day I told Sister Dorothy and others of the big grain elevator fire I seen at the Illinois Central Railroad siding and one asked 'did you set it.' I said nothing more."¹⁸²

At St. Joseph's Henry was employed as a cleaner, working both in the hospital itself and in the nuns' residence. The work was heavy, and from the beginning he complained of physical difficulties.

At the earliest of my time, because of an old injury to my right shoulder, I had to be left handed, with the sweeping broom and other things. All Sister's scoldings could not change me to sweeping with my right. As my shoulder injury was caused by a fight I did not explain to her.¹⁸³

Many a time I scrubbed the floors of the sleeping rooms, and the hundred foot long hall of their dormitory on my hands and knees ... I'll still do it on my hands and knees rather than cleaning floors with a darn sloppy mop. That never does the cleaning so well as the humble old fashioned way. I'll get down on my knees still with soap, rag, and scrubbing brush.¹⁸⁴

Obviously, Darger was not unaware of the demeaning nature of his work. The repeated phrase "on my hands and knees" rings out as a kind of litany; "and that was not done that way to humble myself — For under no condition would I humble myself and Heaven help the one who would dare humble me."¹⁸⁵

IN THAT ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL was a Catholic institution, Darger once more found himself exposed to the Catholic religion. He discussed his spiritual state with the nuns, assuring them that he was a baptized Catholic, despite a long absence from the faith occasioned by his residence in the Lincoln Asylum. "On the Christmas Midnight mass, a cold snowy one in December, 1909, I received in their chapel my first Holy communion."¹⁸⁶ While this renewal of his faith may initially have been comforting, his religious involvement soon became the source of considerable psychological ambivalence and spiritual confusion.

In his daily work he was, of course, under the strict supervision of the same nuns. Curiously lacking in compassion, they displayed little warmth toward this creature who they saw largely as a source of physical labor, an inferior to be ordered around. He was often caught in the political struggles of the sisters, with different nuns competing for his services. "I will not and never did stand for having two persons over me at the same time."¹⁸⁷ Lacking much experience of a mother, he seems to have had little expectation of human warmth or love, and little ability to awaken it in others. Much of his account of his life was now taken up with complaints about one or another of these women.

I had also all the time I was there an extra job of carting away to the engine house trash fire box lots of junk ... It was a heck of a job on the rainy days, or the cold of winter or also with summer thunderstorms ... I worked even at my janitor job, or out there getting rid of the trash in the winter when I had my worst colds. You see I don't know why, but they would not let me off, when really I should have been in bed and under treatment. I dared not take off. And you call that charity? Afraid I would be behind in my work and that would cost them money.¹⁸⁸

Darger was, however, far more perceptive than he let on. He was acutely sensitive to the dynamics of the social situation in which he found himself, aware of the competitiveness of the nuns and their naive attempts to control and manipulate him. Speaking of one sister he says:

I got along all right, never talked back from respect and knew how to hold my ground. I was not afraid of her, and she could see it. That made her like me. She did not like anyone who was afraid of her. And do your duty and there was no trouble.¹⁸⁹

On another occasion he writes: "I could see that while scolding me she also had a hard fight with herself to keep from laughing over it."¹⁹⁰ At St. Joseph's one nun earned his undying hatred.

Sister Depaul had a bulldog like face, and seemed to have the disposition of one. I don't really believe any Catholic Sister should [have] such a disposition. That is not Charity or Christ like. Though she was a Sister I had a very intense dislike for her and did my best to avoid her.¹⁹¹

While every institution in which Henry worked possessed its own Sister DePaul, or worse, he usually seemed able to assess their varying personalities and to play them off against one another. He seems to have felt little for them as individuals, seeking merely to determine how much trouble or frustration each one might represent. Only Sister DePaul succeeded in disturbing him to the point that he finally left St. Joseph's Hospital, and sought employment elsewhere.

Darger in the Army

In the middle of his fourteen-year stay at St. Joseph's, Darger was drafted.¹⁹² On September 12, 1917, he was sent to Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, for two months of basic training as a private in company "L," 32 Infantry. Then, in November 1917, he was "transferred to Camp Logan, Texas with a long train load of buddies."¹⁹³ [1.16]

Before the year ended he had been discharged on medical grounds, ostensibly because of problems with his eyes. Darger's honorable discharge papers contain the first objective physical description of him we have.¹⁹⁴ He was short, 5 feet 1 inch in height. He had blue eyes, a dark complexion, and brown hair. Only twenty-five years old, his physical condition was described as poor. His character was indicated as good.

The extreme brevity of Darger's stay in the army, and the fact that he did not see military action, are probably an indication of his inability to function in an unprotected environment. Unlike many young draftees, he might have been expected to adapt quickly to life in yet another institution for boys, governed by arbitrary rules and dominated by male figures in authority. But, once again, as at the State Farm, a curious inability to cope with change left him feeling homesick and ill at ease. "I would have in a way liked the army life, only I was forced to leave behind things I loved too much. That was almost unbearable ... I so strongly yearned for what I had to leave behind."¹⁹⁵



1.16
"Picturesque Camp Logan, Houston, Texas." From a booklet of postcards preserved in Darger's room. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

What those “things” were, it is almost impossible to imagine, unless what he missed was the security of his simple life at the hospital, the safe and repetitive nature of each day. Writing of army life in retrospect, he still sounds incredibly childlike — frightened of injections, excited by the prospect of buying candies in the commissary.

I dreaded them, because my arm or where I got the darn shots was so sore for days. Some of the shots even made me ill. The only good part was the canteen where I could buy all sorts of refreshments and other goodies.¹⁹⁶

As we will see later, Darger’s psychological state, both before and during his time in the military, may have been characterized by more profound disturbance than he was capable of realizing. The brief period of military training undoubtedly brought about still greater confusion and regression. While his discharge papers fail to tell us anything concerning his psychological condition, his signature at the bottom of the form is not only childish, but contains errors in the spelling of his name. The written line is extraordinarily erratic and shaky, and the graphic character of the signature as a whole is suggestive of acute mental disturbance.

Whatever the cause of his rejection by the army physicians, Darger never got over the blow to his self-esteem. In the other world he had already begun to construct, he was provided with a lifelong career in the military, vastly increased authority and responsibility, and the rank of Captain.

DARGER RETURNED to his job at St. Joseph’s Hospital after his discharge from the army. He had maintained contact with the sisters there, and they had in turn demonstrated an unexpected degree of concern about him. “I also wrote to Sister Carmilla who was Superior at St. Joseph’s Hospital, and in the answer to my letters, she still sent me monthly wages though I was still in the army.”¹⁹⁷

Henry seems to have done a surprising amount of letter writing, though only a few copies of actual letters survive in his room. During his short stay in the army he corresponded with a fellow worker at St. Joseph’s, Thomas M. Phelan, who seems to have become a friend.

When I was in the army during nineteen seventeen, I would write him letters. Would you believe it when I received his answers, I discovered his handwriting was exactly like my father’s? It certainly was.¹⁹⁸

Phelan, who came to the hospital around 1910, was considerably older than Henry. He would seem, for a time, to have assumed importance in Darger’s life as a replacement for the father he had lost. While this identification appears initially to have resulted in a strong friendship, at least on Henry’s side, it was also to become the source of intense ambivalence. It is in the relationship with Phelan that we first cross the divide separating Henry’s real world from the Realms of the Unreal. For the first time, it becomes impossible to distinguish fact from fantasy in Darger’s life (see p. 642).¹⁹⁹

The autobiography tells us almost nothing about Henry’s personal life during his young manhood. In part, this may be because, outside of his work, he had little in the way of personal or social experience. There is no further mention of his family; no reference to the death of his uncle August in 1916, or the loss of his uncle Charles in 1925. His godmother also disappears from the record. He was now seemingly entirely on his own. It was perhaps for this reason that the friendship with Thomas Phelan assumed such importance.

For much of the period at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Darger lived in the residence for unmarried men.²⁰⁰ For a short time he shared a room with Thomas Phelan, at least until a series of events led to the extreme antipathy which characterized Darger’s references to Phelan as a monstrously evil character in *The Realms*. In the relatively objective atmosphere of the autobiography, Phelan was introduced as follows:

I also forgot to mention while working at St. Joseph’s Hospital there came first as a patient an old man who was there for some kind of sickness, a sort of shaking sickness, but it was not palsy. Afterwards he was put in charge of us [at the] working men’s house that we sleep in ... Mr. Phelan took charge of things, and he willingly did his work without pay to make up as hospital pay as that he had no money to pay his hospital bill. He had studied for the priesthood but failed to be one because of his oncoming illness.²⁰¹

This is the only reference to Phelan in *The History of My Life*. However, Darger kept other diaries and journals over the years, and in these contemporary and more bizarre documents a very different picture of their relationship emerges.

When first arrived sometime in 1910 Thomas Phelan a probable pious or hipcritical man caused loss of first manuscript either by failing to watch the place or by destroying it himself on the excuse of declaring it trash and refusing to own up what happened to it when asked ... a few days later started new manuscript only to rescue it from destruction the next day. Phelan suspected. A feeling of enmity arises against him. First quarrel then terrible enmity ... Two of Phelan's slanders which are resented to the bitter end. Now real enemies. Move out of his room. In meantime war progressed for two years, terrible battles by hundreds, destruction of cities and towns and massacres of children.²⁰²

Darger appears to have begun to write his great history, *In The Realms of the Unreal*, sometime after his arrival at St. Joseph's Hospital. In various documents he gives the date for the beginning of his activity as a writer as 1910, 1911, and June 1912. In 1910 he would have been only eighteen years old.

The writing of the Glandco-Angelinian war started in June, 1912 and still progressing up to January, 1916.²⁰³

Started Type Writing Manuscript in April 30, 1916.²⁰⁴

However, in several documents Darger makes reference to an early manuscript that was lost or stolen.²⁰⁵ He refers to this missing section of *The Realms* as follows:

Since September, 1910, a manuscript containing the Abbysinkilian-Abbieannian war and Tripolygonian war had disappeared most mysteriously.²⁰⁶

Henry remained deeply upset and angry about this loss for many years, and at some point began to attribute responsibility for the material's disappearance to his roommate, Thomas Phelan, and ultimately to God.

A SECOND MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE, the loss of a photograph, provoked still more intense rage and religious conflict.²⁰⁷ The picture, identified by Darger as a depiction of "little Miss Annie Aronburg" (the name is fictitious), came originally "from Chicago Daily News of June May or July [1911]."²⁰⁸ There is reasonable evidence to suggest that the photograph in question was that of a five-year-old girl, Elsie Paroubek, whose body was found in a drainage canal in Chicago on Monday, May 8, 1911.²⁰⁹ She was initially assumed to have been kidnapped and murdered.²¹⁰ Her picture appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Daily News*, on May 9, 1911 [see illustration 9.1].

For a number of reasons, this photograph became uniquely important to Darger, perhaps precisely because it was lost. He began to pray for its return and became increasingly upset when his prayers were not answered. Documents preserved in *The Realms* and in his journals record his increasingly frantic attempts to recover the picture. "Read Bible every evening. Say seven rosaries every day. Three litanies per day. Offer Novena prayers every day and receive communion every Sunday."²¹¹

It seems that he built an altar, before which he presented his petition.

In the barn of William Schloeder an altar has been erected where prayers for petition will be said.²¹²

Erecting altar to pray before in order to obtain petition before the destruction of Christians arrive ... making the mimic chapel neat and clean no matter how much work. Buying material of all sorts for the shrine.²¹³

In his intense frustration at the failure of his prayers and petitions, Darger apparently broke temporarily with the church. Writing of himself, he says: "he refused to go to Mass for over four years and a half, and also through same cause did not receive the sacraments ... all that time he also blasphemed god so often."²¹⁴ This tremendous religious conflict, and the terrible rage which prompted it, lies, as we will see, at the very heart of *The Realms*. It also seems to have exerted a powerful effect on his life during the period when he was working at St. Joseph's Hospital. It is difficult, however, to determine where historical fact leaves off in this matter and subjective fantasy begins. We have begun to move, almost imperceptibly, from Darger's external life to his other, and largely internal, world. For this reason, consideration of these more subjective aspects of his life will be dealt with in later chapters.

Darger left St. Joseph's Hospital of his own accord, not because of internal conflict, but because of his continuing battles with Sister DePaul.

My days of agony continued with Sister Depaul, and so to Sister Carmilla I pretended I was going to quit because she seemed to refuse to give me a vacation, but truly I was leaving because of the what I called, "persecution" of sister Depaul ... As I wrote before if not now, I finally could not stand it any longer and therefore quit, and even a day later got a new [job] at Grant Hospital.²¹⁵

Although he was let go readily enough, an attempt was made to get him to come back, an indication that his work was valued and that he was not easily replaced. "Some weeks later Sister Dorothy sent the orderly to my house at Mrs. Anchutz to ask me if I would like to come back. My fear of Sister Depaul made me refuse."²¹⁶

Grant Hospital

1922-28

Henry Darger was employed at the Grant Hospital of Chicago for a period of about five years. He was always prompt in his duties and he did his work well. He is honest.

—January 23, 1928²¹⁷

It was during the years at Grant Hospital that Darger assumed the less demanding role of dishwasher.

... at Grant Hospital where I worked in the dish-washing department in the main kitchen the work was some time slack and sometimes too much ... I received two half days off a week and two weeks vacation.²¹⁸ (1.17)

It appears that the job at this secular institution, which he found for himself, was not offered as an act of charity but as straightforward employment. Although he continued to describe occasional difficulties with female supervisors, the fact that he was now living away from the hospital both encouraged his independence and directed his interest and energy toward friends and experiences in the outside world.

I roomed at a place at the Southwest corner of Kenmore and Webster, 1035 Webster Avenue. It was a three story wooden house owned by East German people by the name of Mrs. and Mr. Anchutz. They seemed sort of Godless in their way of living, but were nice people to room with.²¹⁹ (1.18)

Henry was evidently not "Godless" at this time. The Anschutz home was convenient for him in that it was located almost directly across the street from St. Vincent's church.²²⁰ Henry attended Mass in



1.17 above
Grant Hospital,
exterior. Reproduced
from *History of
Medicine and Surgery
and Physicians and
Surgeons of Chicago*,
Biographical
Publishing Corporation
(Chicago, 1922).



1.18 right
1035 Webster Avenue,
Chicago. The home of
Emil and Minnie
Anschutz; Darger's
rooming house, where
*In the Realms of the
Unreal* was written.
Photograph by the
author.

this church for the remainder of his life. In later years it would provide what little social activity and human contact he would enjoy.

The Anschutz family operated a boarding house in their large home. Perhaps it was the fact that they were Germans that led Darger to make his home with them for so many years. "During my stay there there were quite a number of roomers who however were not steady roomers but come and go."²²¹ In an existence without incident, it is others whose comings and goings provide needed excitement. These transient boarders enlarged Henry's limited experience of life.

After one particular one left, the police came looking for him, on some swindling charge, but he had left on short notice at night told no one not even the landlord and left no address. As far as I can ascertain they never found him, or heard of him again. I was the one that late morning to discover he was gone. I took the police up to his room, but he was gone and all his belongings. Unusually swindlers are very shrewd and clever.

Two other roomers, good ones, died, one of ingrown goiter that strangled him. The other killed himself but not where he roomed.²²²

There is no indication that any of these people became Henry's friends. Over time, he did form ties of friendship with Emil and Minni Anschutz. They bought small presents for him at Christmas.²²³ "At New Years we celebrated by seeing the old year out and the new year in. We had ginger ale or other soft drinks."²²⁴ Given his lack of family, and the many years without any real home, these small celebrations may have meant a lot to Henry. We

should not, however, exaggerate the intimacy of the relationship. A curious detail of life at the Anschutzs reveals the reality of Henry's situation and the extent of his loneliness and deprivation.

The Landlady did not furnish much heat in her place. It was true too, because many a day I spent in my cold room there in the winters ... as it happened to be most of the roomers were away to work most of the day, she said it was wasting the coal and other fuel, and only put on the heat about late afternoon before they came home ... Myself, coming home earlier than the others I passed many a time inside, went to bed with my clothes on and never complained.²²⁵

Darger was acutely sensitive to cold, and the Chicago winters provided extreme examples of both low temperatures and heavy snowfall. An astonishing number of references to violent weather conditions occupy a good deal of space in his autobiography. In the absence of vivid accounts of his feelings, or portrayals of emotionally charged events; dramatic descriptions of shifts in the weather, record-breaking storms, snowfalls, or extremes of temperature, occupy places where feelings might be expected to occur in his writings, and in his life. On occasion, it is actually possible to witness the substitution.

All through his life Darger responded to weather by registering it in his memory, with a degree of accuracy and precision that is highly unusual. We know that in later life his principal subject of conversation was the weather. But, unlike most people, Darger could provide exact statistics extending back across the decades. While he was still at St. Joseph's Hospital, he was particularly

impressed by heavy snowfalls occurring in 1912 and 1918. "I remember after I came back [from the army], the great big blizzard of January 6 and seventh 1918, and it was Sunday the feast of Little Christmas and the Monday after."²²⁶

Extremely low temperatures made a particularly strong impression on Darger because he had to walk to work. This was especially true when he worked at Grant Hospital because the walk was a long one.

Grant Hospital, I believe, was fifteen blocks from where I lived to the West at the Anchutz 1035 Webster, and it was an ordeal to walk it in bad weather especially in the winter and during severe below zero cold waves.²²⁷

I believe my first winter at Grant Hospital was one of the coldest I have ever known.²²⁸

Darger's style of written description is obsessively concrete. He pays an astonishing amount of attention to numbers, dates, measurements, and directions, using words to construct maps. It is a style perfectly suited to describing cold.

What I would like to write about was the distance I had to go and walk it too. The meanest winters I had to walk it. These were those of 1924 and 1927. The distance was six blocks east to Larabee street, then one long block to Grant Place, and three quarters of a block East on Grant Place to the main entrance. How I put up with the severe cold that distance I do not know, but I did. I did not mind the walk in hot summer weather.²²⁹

This oddly mechanical and overly rigid style, in the absence of emotion, is reflective of an obsessional personality. It is a manner of writing with which we will become more than familiar when we enter the curiously objective and factual world of *The Realms*.

Darger does not seem to have been aware of the connection between his boyhood preoccupation with weather, and the manifestation of the same interest in his later life. He was conscious that major storms excited him, and he wondered why. The storm he refers to most often was that of the winter of 1930.

March 26 and 27 had a very big snow-storm, of which I cannot explain why I really enjoyed. The paper I bought late afternoon (it's a wonder I could get it), said nineteen inches had already fallen and even then the storm seemed at its worst, and showed no sign of letting up. Really though the whole storm I am sure it got way much deeper because it snowed severely all night Saturday, and also all day Sunday, and again way into the night ... but nevertheless, I enjoyed the storm.²³⁰

Extreme intensities of heat are also characteristic of Chicago, and Darger kept track of those which broke records. These events clearly excited him.

[T]he summer from 1930 to 1937 were the most hottest I have ever seen or felt here ... The summer of 1934, however, broke all records on July 18. Yet too 1933 also broke all records, for believe it or not, for three weeks it was over a hundred and three in the shade, but never reached the temperature of July 18, 1934.²³¹

Apparently, the fact that Henry was present at these record-breaking events made them suitable material for the history of his life. If anything, his obsessional interest in weather grew stronger as he grew older. From 1958 to 1967 he kept daily written records of each day's weather in a series of journals entitled "Weather Report of Cold and Warm, Also Summer Heats and Cool Spells, Storms, and Fair or Cloudy Days, Contrary to What the Weatherman Says, and Also True Too."²³² [1.19]

DURING THE COURSE of his long life, Darger seems to have had only one true friend — William Schloeder. Although little is known of Schloeder, other than what we are told by Darger, this seems to have been a lasting relationship that endured until Schloeder's death. They seem to have related to each other as equals, enjoying similar things, and seeking out one another's company. In some respects the friendship may have approximated a *folie-à-deux*.

The extent to which anyone assumed real significance in Darger's emotional life is measured by their appearance, and importance, in *The Realms of the Unreal*. Most of the characters in *The Realms* are purely fictional. The most important non-fictional character is Darger himself, but next to him, William Schloeder appears with great regularity. At the beginning of the story we learn of the unique importance of Darger's friend.

"His friend's name is William Schloder. The two are regular hawks. They are the head presidents of the children's protective society — called the Gemini — a lodge of men congregated who are terrible enemies of all those who prove themselves child haters. They are both supreme heads of

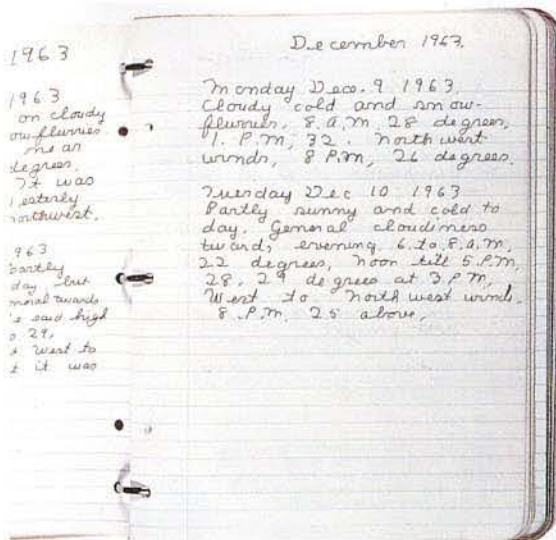
the Protective Society, and would bring the whole bunch down here to get the Glandelinians ... I have a picture of them both," and he produced a picture of two tall men, not handsome in looks or appearance, but nevertheless with a grim determination upon their faces.²³³

Invited to go to Abbieanna to join in the fight against the evil, child-hating Glandelinians, Darger is at first unsure. It is William Schloeder who calls him to his senses.

"You swore that if you had the chance to avenge all of the sufferings of the little children which you read of during the horrible rebellion, and now you have the opportunity. Go and take it before it is too late." "I will," answered Darger angrily. "I'll have to take my whole assembly of members with me, and that includes you as you are my main assistant. Are you willing? Because if you are not, I won't go."²³⁴

In this brief passage from *The Realms*, we sense something of the emotional importance William had begun to assume in Henry's life. But, as with the subjective account of Thomas Phelan, it is difficult to determine where reality is to be found in this piece of imaginative writing.

Darger was writing throughout the years of his friendship with Schloeder. He wove his friend's name and personality all through *The Realms*, from the first volume to the last. It would seem probable that, if anyone beside Darger was familiar with portions of the manuscript, that fortunate person would have to have been William Schloeder. One senses that in a curious way Schloeder may have accompanied his friend, for a time, on his voyage to another world. Yet, in *The History of My Life*, he



1.19
Henry Darger
Weather Book,
Volume One, 1958.
Detail of open
volume. Collection
American Folk Art
Museum, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

1.20 left
"Off to Frisco." Henry
Darger (at right) and
William Schloeder.
One of two postcards
preserved in Darger's
room. ©1998 Kiyoko
Lerner.

1.21 right
"We're on Our Way."
Henry Darger
(at left) and William
Schloeder. One of two
postcards preserved
in Darger's room.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



makes only a couple of brief appearances, finally disappearing when he moved to San Antonio in 1956.²³⁵ The few references to William, or "Whillie" as Darger called him, are quite straightforward.

During the time or years I worked both at St. Joseph's and Alexian Brothers Hospital, and also at Grant Hospital, every evening and Sunday afternoons off, I went visiting a special friend of mine by the name of Whilliam Schloeder. I don't know his middle name, but he was a Catholic and so was his folks and sisters. We often went to Riverview Park. I did all the spending.²³⁶

A picture exists which might have been taken on such an outing. It shows Darger and William Schloeder seated on the back of a train, leaving for the Gold Rush. Taken on a standard photographer's "set," the portrait of the two men was intended as an amusing trick photograph. It is the only early picture of Henry to survive.²³⁷ (1.20, 1.21)

William Schloeder was one of five children.

He had a very good pious mother, but I know nothing about his father because he died not long after I went seeing Whillie. He had three grown sisters and a younger but grown brother, Henry. His sisters could boss Whillie, but not Henry.²³⁸

The family seems to have originated in Luxembourg, where William, the older son, may have been born. Possibly his European origin, and the fact that like Darger's father he would have had a foreign accent, made him particularly attractive as a friend for Henry. In retrospect, Darger said that William was like a brother to him.²³⁹ Like Henry, he appears to have held low-level jobs as a laborer.²⁴⁰ In the photograph, he certainly appears older — and not a little strange.

Darger says little about what they did together. In *The Realms*, there is a brief description of the two friends on a visit to Lincoln Park, where they "take two boat rides, walked along the lake front, saw all the animals and birds, and started for the restaurant to buy themselves a good dinner."²⁴¹ Their visits to local parks would inevitably have taken them to the great Century of Progress Exposition, held in Chicago in 1933–34. There, Darger may have seen the celebrated Sinclair Dinosaur Exhibit, an exhibition of life-size prehistoric animals which was the hit of the fair. These enormous plaster models of extinct reptiles may have played a part in inspiring the complex evolution of the Blengiglomenean serpents, who darken the night skies, and provide comic relief, in the tormented other world of *The Realms* (see chapter 7 below).

THE TWO YOUNG MEN — Darger was thirty when he moved to Grant Hospital — shared an interest in fires. The most spectacular fire, and one which they attended together, was the great Broom Factory Fire of October 31, 1924.²⁴² The importance of this event to Henry is indicated by the fact that his account of it fills ten pages of his autobiography, more than any other event.

I and Whillie went on our way to see where the fire was. It was a twenty minutes walk but we got there. It was the big two thousand foot long and three hundred foot wide broom factory, the west end of which is across on Fullerton from the St. Augustine old people's home.²⁴³

Henry neglected to mention that it was in this old people's home that his father had died sixteen years before.²⁴⁴ Surely the excitement he admits feeling at this fire was in part inspired by

memories of the tar factory fire he attended with his father. On the occasion of the Broom Factory Fire, his friend Schloeder assumed the role of Henry's father, a function he may often have performed in Henry's mind.

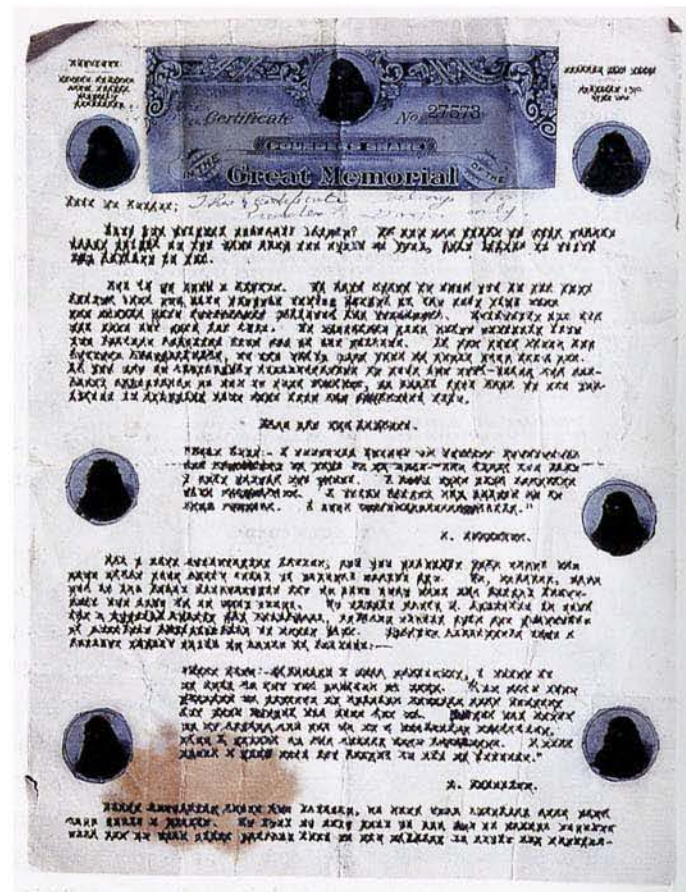
The burning building was 4 and a half stories high. Only a quarter of the building was then on fire, but despite the fierce fight put up by all the firemen, within an hour the whole immense long structure from street floor to the top was a raging inferno. The flames seemed to leap three hundred feet from the roof amid great clouds of roiling smoke as long as the building. The smoke went so high I and Whillie could not estimate it ... I have seen quite a number of big fires in my day, but this one had them all beat put together.²⁴⁵

Henry tells us he stayed "near the fire until close to eleven P.M. at night ... I was still so excited about the fire that I slept but little."²⁴⁶

Another landmark event in Chicago history which Darger writes about with much excitement was "the big moonshine explosion on Webster Street and Southport avenue ... The terrible blast said to have been heard six miles away happened January 30, 1930 at night just after I got into bed."²⁴⁷ In writing about this event, Henry briefly considered whether it might have been "a black hand bomb," rather than an illegal still, which caused the explosion. "The owner, however, was able to prove he received no threatening black hand letters."²⁴⁸

THE BLACK HAND organization may have possessed particular importance for Darger because of his brief membership in the "Black Brothers Lodge," or the "Gemini." No mention of the club occurs in his autobiography, and it may not have existed outside of *The Realms*, where the many members of the Gemini play a part in the war against the child-slave-owning Glandelinians. The only evidence for its actual existence is provided by a number of handmade and decorated membership certificates found in Darger's room [1. 22]. Made by Darger himself, they consist of typed documents, originally having nothing to do with this purpose, in which each letter has been individually crossed out with a handwritten "X." A series of hooded and masked black figures, hand-painted to eliminate everything but the eyes, have been arranged around the borders of the page. Oval holes have been cut out around the edge of the certificate, and the head and shoulders of dark figures have been introduced into these frames. A certificate of membership, again adapted from some unrelated purpose, has been introduced into a large rectangular cut-out window at the top of the sheet. On another of these homemade documents a larger version of the draped figure is depicted beside the hand-lettered legend "Black Brothers Loxdge." Another similar certificate is preserved with a signature indicating that it once belonged to Thomas A. Newsome, who is described on it as a "primary founder."²⁴⁹

Darger obviously went to a lot of trouble to make these official-looking membership forms, one of which bears the handwritten inscription: "This certificate belongs to President Darger only." It also has a date written in a smaller hand: 1910. No certificate is preserved for William Schloeder,



1.22
"Black Brother's Lodge." Handmade and decorated membership certificate found in Darger's room. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

possibly because he retained his own copy at home. On the basis of these strange and secret documents, it seems at least plausible to suggest that a club of some kind briefly existed, with Darger and Schloeder as presidents, and with at least one additional member, Thomas A. Newsome.²⁵⁰ It is possible that the "mimic altar which was erected in the barn of Whilliam Schloder" formed part of the club's secret meeting place.²⁵¹ If the date on one of the membership certificates can be trusted, and if the barn was indeed the club's meeting place, it would imply that as early as 1910 Darger and Schloeder had become friends and the founders of the child protection society. Darger would have been eighteen. The end of the club is described in volume one of *The Realms*. "On August 1916, club, through reasons not stated here, was broken up. Great loss in pictures on account of it. Makes situation for the christian cause worse. Altar pulled down."²⁵² These events have the ring of factual truth. They serve to remind us, as well, of a critically important point: In Darger's life there was never a sharp distinction between reality and fantasy. The alternate world he was increasingly involved in constructing constantly intruded into his actual life — more and more of his material existence was absorbed by activities that had little to do with his external world. Our effort to describe Darger's external or "real" life is constantly derailed as we slip off the edge into the Realms of the Unreal.

After many years of real friendship between the two men William Schloeder left Chicago with his sister Catherine to live in San Antonio, Texas.

I wrote to Whillie often, but as he could not write in English his sister wrote his answers for him. When in San Antonio

three years my friend Whillie died on the 5 of May (I forgot the year) of the Asian flue, and since that happened I am all alone. I never palled with anyone since.²⁵³

This wistful admission is undoubtedly true.

A copy of Darger's letter of sympathy addressed to "My dear friend Miss Catherine Schloeder," and dated Monday, June 1, 1959, was found in Henry's room. It contains the correct date of William's death, Saturday, May 2, 1959.

I feel as if lost in empty space ... I didn't write as soon as need be because I was out of sorts and shaken by the news of his death. He was like a brother to me. Now nothing matters to me at all and I am going to hereafter live my kind of life ... a loss is hard to take. It sure is to me to loose him for then too I lost all I had and had a hard time to stand it.

In later life Darger was almost unimaginably alone, isolated, and reclusive. He had no friends, and almost no one ever came to his room.²⁵⁴ He avoided contact for the most part, and was far too strange, in appearance and manner for most people to make the effort that would have been involved to break through the wall of solitude he had erected. Approximately fifty years of friendship with Schloeder indicate, however, that he was not incapable of intimacy, particularly in the very rare situation when someone proved capable of entering with enthusiasm into his imaginative world. It is possible, though by no means certain, that we owe the existence of *The Realms*, at least in part, to the sympathetic participation of William Schloeder as audience and witness over many years to the world of imagination that Darger was constructing.

DARGER'S RELATION with women in the years of his young manhood, and indeed throughout his life, seems to have been all but non-existent. Only little girls truly occupied his attention, and then only in fantasy. A few lyrical pages in the autobiography depict the tenuousness of his fleeting attraction to a member of the opposite sex. He scarcely appears to have known what was happening, as his nascent passion underwent a curious process of absorption by weather. The story unfolds at Grant Hospital.

There was a young girl there who took charge of the help's main dining room on the ground floor. Her name was Johanne Kuback. It seemed strange that every time she had her afternoons off, it would winter or summer come a heavy long rain ... I felt sort of sorry for her and proposed if she and the housekeeper were willing she could for once change half days with me ... She chose the Sunday June 2, Feast of Corpus Christi. My Sundays usually had been sunny. I'll have to write this down: Did it rain that afternoon? At two thirty it came, cloud as black or the color of Brown black and a very terrific cloud burst that lasted more than an hour. Thunder was unusually frequent but not loud. The rain afterwards kept until late evening as a very heavy drizzle.

The next day in the morning, I told her truthfully I was sorry for the debauchery of the weather, and she said she knew it might happen because of having been brought up in the country she knew the tricks of the weather, and could tell by cloud formations what would come. So can I.²⁵⁵

This is the only hint of romance in *The History of My Life*. One senses that by exchanging days off, Henry felt he was having a Sunday date with Johanne. That he felt an attraction toward her is obvious, that he recognized what he felt, less so. Only his very unusual use of the word "debauchery" provides an indication of the sexual nature of his feelings. The storm provided the necessary release for his pent-up emotions. Not surprisingly, what started as a rainfall turned into a flood.

The rain too was heavy and the wind blew like a hurricane that flooded all the base-ment and kitchen. In the kitchen on that Sunday afternoon, the whole base-ment too, the water was almost up to your knees. No one could work in the kitchen.²⁵⁶

In a curious way, Henry and Johanne seem to have shared something on that rainy Sunday. The next day they seem to have known that something had occurred which brought them close together, the weather serving as intermediary. Romance had passed overhead like the fleeting storm. The sky cleared, and no more was heard of Johanne Kuback.

St. Joseph's Hospital II

1928-47

The division of Darger's working life into four periods of varying lengths, during which he worked at different hospitals, has no real justification. He was a dishwasher now, and where he washed dishes appears to have mattered very little to him. Perhaps he felt more at home back at St. Joseph's in that it was the first place he had worked, and a Catholic institution. Sister DePaul was no longer there, but in the dishwashing room he now found himself under the watchful eye of yet another "prim" sister of charity.²⁵⁷

I was under another prime and severe one, Sister Rufina. She had both Mrs. Stevens (Grant Hospital) and sister Depaul put together beat by a mile. If you talked back to her it would also result in loosing your job ... As there was then an awfully severe depression on [1929], and it was utterly impossible to get a job with any place, I had to stay there and go through a number of years of misery because of her constant nagging.²⁵⁸

Darger's awareness of the necessity of earning his own living, all through his life, provides evidence of a very solidly anchored sense of reality, as does his ability to tolerate difficult and unpleasant work situations. He enjoyed the dubious triumph of outliving most of the supervisors he worked with.

As his account of his life proceeds, he says less and less about his work and about external reality in general. His real life was now lived primarily in his room, and in his other world. The necessity of leaving that room in the late summer of 1932, to move up the street to a rooming house at 851

Webster, must have represented far more of a threat to his equilibrium and sense of security than any change of jobs. However superficial the ties that he had established with the Anschutzs, they had provided him with a symbolic family and a sense of home.²⁵⁹ In the two small rooms he rented on the third floor at 851 Webster, he was far more isolated, and inclined to retreat ever deeper into fantasy (1. 23).

It was in these two rooming houses on Webster Street that Darger constructed his alternate world, writing and illustrating *In the Realms of the Unreal*. Given how little time he actually had off, it is difficult to imagine how he found time to write the 15,209-page, typewritten history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war. While he claims to have begun writing while still living at St. Joseph's Hospital, c.1910, most of the surviving manuscript must have taken shape while he lived with the Anschutz family. At a specific point in the creative process, Darger decided to bind his book. There is clear evidence that this operation, which resulted in seven enormous hand-bound volumes, was carried out in 1932, perhaps in connection with his move to the new room. Whether the remaining volumes had yet to be written, or whether he simply ran out of the material and energy needed to bind the remaining volumes, isn't known. The remaining piles of typed manuscript preserved in his room at his death were unbound.

It is evident that the volumes were not all written in chronological order. No firm date of completion can be assigned as yet to the fourteen surviving volumes of *The Realms* (for a more detailed discussion of the chronology of Darger's writings, see chapter 2).

1.23

851 Webster Avenue,
Chicago. The rooming
house owned by
Nathan Lerner.
Photograph by the
author.



There is also firm evidence to suggest that while living with the Anshutzs Henry began to experiment with a variety of methods of picture-making, particularly the modification of small photographs for the depiction of individual characters (see illustration 3.13), and various types of painted collage for rendering scenes of battle (see illustration 3.25). Some of the illusionistic collages make use of photographs from German illustrated news magazines which he probably obtained from his landlord. The completion of the largest and most important of the collage compositions, *The Battle of Calverhine*, can be dated with certainty as occurring before August 1929, while he was still living at 1035 Webster.²⁶⁰ It must have been quite a scene when Henry carried this huge work down the street to his new room.

At this early stage it appears that many of the pictures were being made, not as illustrations for the book, but as additions to the decor of his room — a means of forcing the physical environment in which he found himself to conform to the internal world in which he increasingly resided. The creation of an altered environment through the use of pictures may go back to the mimic shrine which he erected in the Schloeder barn. On the other hand, the long horizontal illustrations for *The Realms*, the so-called collage-drawings on which Darger's reputation as an artist is based, can be firmly dated on the basis of internal evidence to the mid-1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and would therefore all have been done while he was living at 851 Webster. By that time much of his creative activity appears to have been focused on the task of pictorial illustration. He seems to have been living by then almost exclusively in his invented other world, and to have become obsessed with

the lives and struggles of imaginary little girls, in particular the seven Vivian sisters. This fantasy material, which all but consumed his later life, will be examined in the chapters which follow.

DARGER'S OBSESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT with little girls had occasional implications for his external life. He was attracted to real children. He envied Whillie's possession of a small niece and nephew, the children of his sister Susan. A curious document found in his room records his wish to adopt a little child of his own.

For a certain man whose name is not to be mentioned here, he is desirous of wishing to have these questions for himself answered, and the questions are these and quite a few. To begin with since the year nineteen seventeen he had constantly prayed for a means as it is called for his hopes of adopting little children and it is now the year of nineteen hundred and twenty nine, and his petitions are not yet answered.²⁶¹

Here again, we stumble upon one of those curious areas of Darger's existence where internal and external realities flow together, and where the factual history of his life grows obscure, lost in the tangles of subjective fantasy. To what extent his wish to adopt an orphan child resulted in a serious effort to set this process in motion is not known. He traces his wish to adopt back to 1917 when he was twenty-five years old and in the army. This oddly unrealistic desire (in the 1920s single men were not seen as suitable parents for adopted children) seems to have reached near psychotic intensity in 1929–30, when the bizarre list of questions was formulated. He appears to have raised the issue with one or another of the

priests in his parish, only to be told that his small income, and the fact that he didn't own property, represented serious obstacles standing in the way of his wish to obtain a child.²⁶² What no one seems to have realized is that Henry may not have known that there was another way of obtaining children — through marriage and sex. As we will see in later chapters, he may have been ignorant of the most basic facts of sexual activity and reproduction. Darger's extreme frustration and confusion at the failure of his prayers and petitions around the issue of adoption contributed to his serious altercations with God, and the collapse of his faith. Once again, none of this conflict surfaces in *The History of My Life*. It is in earlier and more subjective documents, and in the halflight of *The Realms*, that his obsessional involvement with children emerges, often with terrifying intensity.

One little girl, who appears only as a character in *The Realms*, may actually have existed. Despite efforts at disguise, we are taken back to St. Joseph's Hospital in the years before the First World War to meet a little girl who seems to have been a patient there: Francis Schmidt.

She was lying in St. Joseph's Hospital at Julo Callio, with a tubercular of the foot the doctors even having been forced to remove a bone from her foot. She suffered something terrible and it was at that time Julo Callio fell into the hands of the Glandelinians.²⁶³

Somewhat later, the same child, now called Francis Smith, surfaces from a different St. Joseph's Hospital.

She remembered St. Joseph's Hospital in the town of Kramer, where when a patient from a Perbullar in the leg and foot she had found many friends even among the worse of men.

But now she encounters Henry Darger, in military guise.

She made her way past the sentries unnoticed into Bicknell's lines until stopped by a guard who she recognised as the man who had worked on the first floor of the hospital when she was a patient there, and who had been almost in love with her, so great was his true friendship. Of course just now he failed to recognize her ... "I know who you are. You was my friend when I was sick and in need."

Suddenly she is surrounded by friends from St. Joseph's, and Darger introduces her.

"She was a little dear to everyone in the hospital while a patient there where I worked before joining you comrades." Some of the soldiers also recognized her being officers by the name of James Bernard Dunn, Thomas Nolan, and Joseph Haley ... Haley had been a cartman in the hospital before the war and had taken her to the dressing room many times.²⁶⁴

Once again, we are able to measure the intensity of Darger's response to someone by the extent to which he finds space for them in *The Realms*. He can have had little real contact with this child in the hospital, but that little was more than enough for him to have fallen in love with her. He seems uneasy about his feelings for the child, as he attempts to qualify his love: "almost in love with her, so great was his friendship." She lingered in his memory, and therefore found her way into *The*

Realms again and again. In the first volume, on shipboard, traveling with the other members of the Gemini to Abbieannia, Darger encounters the Captain's shy little daughter.

She acknowledged that she knew Darger and that her name was Francis Schmidt. He had spoken to her considerably that day. A bright little miss for her early years. He had seen her before at St. Joseph's Hospital when she was laid up with a tubercular foot. He asked her if she knew the Vivian girls. "Yes, they were small then, but very pretty. So good that at times I was afraid of them."²⁶⁵

What is clear is that Darger's vague attempts to modify external reality met with little success. He seems to have had no insight into the nature of more complex social situations, and would certainly have met with rejection in his attempt to adopt a child.²⁶⁶ He had limited understanding of how his wishes and needs appeared to others, though for the most part he knew enough to conceal them in the secret places of his heart, or in the obscurity of *The Realms*. But in those places — in his fantasy and in the world he was constructing piece by piece over the years — he could realize his desires and live out the life he so desired to live. There, he could spend all day talking with his friend Francis, and with her father's permission, carry her off to Abbieannia to meet his friends in the Realms of the Unreal.

ONE OF THE GREAT mysteries presented by Darger's existence is his ability to encapsulate his other world, and the life which he lived in fantasy, successfully. None of his rich fantasy existence appears to have spilled over into his working life —

for example, no one recognized him as in any way extraordinary or dangerous. If anything, they saw him as less than human. In a way, Darger had learned to make himself invisible, to pass himself off as the insignificant and uninteresting person people expected him to be. Those encountering him for the first time seem to have responded to him as odd, unattractive, and occasionally as disturbing. On the rare occasions when he was dismissed from a hospital job, it was usually by someone who was newly appointed as his supervisor. This was the case at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1947, when after nineteen years of employment in the kitchen, he was asked to leave on the grounds that the work had become too much for him. He was fifty-five years old.

In being dismissed I believe I was better off. I really had worked from Seven A.M. to 8:30 P.M. and never got any time off ... The day I was dismissed a Sister by the name of Alberta was the Superior. I was not there long enough to know her nature but it was she who let me go. But she was nice about it. She told me I was not fired for any wrong doing. She said the nurses told her that I was there too long, the work was too much, the hours too long, and could cause me to break down in my health ... Though fired I could eat my meals there yet until I got a new job. She suggested an easier job and with much shorter hours. I got a new job then at the Alexian Brothers Hospital during the middle of August, 1947 after being out of work for a week.²⁶⁷

Alexian Brothers Hospital 1947-63

With the move to the vast hospital on Beldon Avenue and Racine run by the Alexian Brothers, Darger found himself in the familiar environment of yet another Catholic institution, but one in which men played a more active role.²⁶⁸ (1. 24) For the first time he found himself under the supervision of priests, and he seemed better able to accept their authority and to relate easily to occasional male co-workers, though he made no close friends.

I was under a brother Fabian by name. He was not severe at all. But still he was somewhat strict. On my job in the dish washing room I had to work only six hours. At this job I stayed there for more than fourteen years ... I worked in the dish washing department there too but not as a dishwasher. I never ran or operated the dishwashing machine. I stripped or scraped the refuse off of the dishes and other utensils to go to the dishwashing machine. When I first came I had to wash all type of the dishes that had on them what the machine would not take off by hand. Sometime here too the work was slack and other times too much.²⁶⁹

It seems that the Brothers were aware of Henry's need for a somewhat lighter job with shorter hours. His health was beginning to deteriorate. At fifty-five years old, he was no longer able to do the heavy work he had done in the past, and he couldn't tolerate the extreme heat associated with dishwashing. The passage of time was also producing changes in the work environment, with post-war modernization and the presence of many more women leading to unsettling innovations.



1.24

Alexian Brother's Hospital, Chicago. Reproduced from *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago*, Biographical Publishing Corporation (Chicago, 1922).

There came one day there came a change in the dishwashing business. The old machine was dismantled and moved out ... and a new machine put into another room, to be operated by only girls or women.

No more men ... I myself got a pot washing job ... However, as the pot washing room was much too hot in the summer, especially for me, it caused me to have a sort of heat sickness and had to be on sick leave for more than eight days. When I came back Miss-Sullivan the head of the kitchen and the vegetable department, transferred me to the vegetable room for my health's sake ... It was more cooler there ... By machine I peeled potatoes and cleaned and worked on all kinds of vegetables. All these had to be on time.²⁷⁰

Despite his physical limitations, Henry continued to work hard and to be perceived as a dependable and good worker. As he points out with pride: "During my stay at the Alexian Brothers I was raised in my pay three times."²⁷¹ At the peak of his earning capacity, he was now earning slightly more than \$200 a month.²⁷² But his autobiography is increasingly occupied with references to physical difficulties and pain.

Like his father, Henry suffered from an unspecified problem which made him lame.²⁷³ He suffered severe pains in one knee which made it almost impossible to stand. At times the pain alternated from one knee to the other and was so acute as to

keep him up all night.²⁷⁴ Lacking much in the way of a pension, he couldn't afford to stop working even after he reached the age of sixty-five when he might have been expected to retire. Aware that he was experiencing difficulty, the hospital authorities once again intervened, providing him with a relatively easy job winding bandages, and a considerably reduced work schedule.

I was transferred to the bandage room under Joseph Harvey. I had a helper by the first name of Jacob. I could not pronounce his last name. The job was rolling long six inch wide bandages called hot packs. They were fourteen feet long ... I got Thursday and Sunday and holidays off. I was in the hospital bandage room for a little more than four years. I do believe I and Joe got along fine, no trouble or nothing ... Yet this sort of work caused me a lot of standing on an uneven floor. With my bad leg and the work was worse yet, when Joe was sick and I had to go it alone.²⁷⁵

This was to be Henry's final job.

Darger's response to terrible pain was furious anger at the God who he blamed for his suffering. He seems to have been overwhelmed with pain and almost disoriented, especially at night.

... the knee pain came on again especially worst after midnight. The left leg then took its turn, and then back to the right. It was very severe. I would get up and apply a hot rag for a time but that

did not help much. When I went back to bed I thought I had received relief, but half an hour later it was even worse. I had to get up and stay up. That alone slightly slackened it ... I'm afraid I was a sort of devil if I may call myself one, during the bad pain of my knee at night.²⁷⁶

In his desperation, Henry found himself in confrontation with God, driven to open rebellion and blasphemy. Overwhelmed with guilt at the enormity of his sin, he turns to the reader for understanding and support. The extent of his isolation is revealed by this desperate dialogue with an imaginary other.

Are you ashamed of me? You ask why? It's because of the pain, I shook my fist towards heaven, meaning it for God ... I firmly believe there is no one, not even you my reader who would, I'm sure, who would put up with such pains, my past severe toothaches, face pains, and side pains, and other things I don't find time to mention here ... The knee pains at night I must confess and am not ashamed to tell of it, I actually shook my fist toward heaven. I didn't mean it for God though, though I felt like it ... You I suppose would have been ashamed of me because of the terrible language and blasphemous words I said constantly during this pain.²⁷⁷

It isn't clear whether his internal rage affected his day-to-day work at the hospital, but it seems probable that it was well contained around others, though he takes masculine pride in being tough.

If something I'm working on goes wrong "I am a spitting growling if not thundering volcano." Blow my top too as you call it, or hit the ceiling. And do I say bad words and blaspheme, Oh, my.²⁷⁸

Henry seems not a little proud of his rebellion, but then he confesses that most of his acts of defiance are not actually directed at people.

It says in the Holy bible "For those who do not bear the cross, there is no salvation?" I'm sorry to say I defied that and still do. Yet if I'm that way what am I going to do, defy or not? It seems impossible to control myself. Yet I am not that way to persons, only all sorts of gadgets and other things.²⁷⁹

On very rare occasions his anger did erupt outside in the world. "I would always have an anger, slight or severe, which made people say I have fire in my eyes."²⁸⁰ Describing an argument with a co-worker at Alexian Brothers, he informs us: "I would not do anything for him, and told him if I had a chance I'd slash him with a knife. I told him he can't get rough with me and get away with it."²⁸¹ A little flash of boyhood surfacing years later in old age. Not surprisingly, he was capable of spontaneous anger directed at little girls. On one occasion, his landlord's little daughter Amy was badly frightened by him.

*I was three or four years old, really small. My baby sitter Martha lived on the same floor. I would play in the hall. There was a cuckoo clock on the side of the door. I went in, and I was pulling the chains of the clock, and I broke it. He came up behind me, and scared me to death. He started screaming at me. I don't remember what he said, except "Get out of here, get out." He was enraged.*²⁸²

Darger's morality too is that of childhood. He seems to have understood that something more was expected of Christians, but he couldn't bring himself to comply.

I just now remember the time while I was still working at St. Joseph's Hospital, on the first floor, that I asked some man, whose name I need not tell, or even do not remember, to do me a special easy favor, which I needed badly. He refused sternly saying he had no time to do anyone favors. I am the sort of person that if anyone refuses to do any favors for me don't expect one from me either.

Surprised at his own audacity, he reopens the dialogue with his astonished reader.

I believe you would think me mean, but, whether you do or not, I am the kind that if a person refuses me a favor, don't dare ask me to do any. I'll stick to that, whether I'm right, wrong, or even if it is sinful. There is another thing too. There is a saying it's better to give than to receive.

But with me I don't give if I don't receive. And receive first too. If anyone don't like my idea on that, they can — well never mind, you know what I mean.²⁸³

At times one suspects, perhaps correctly, that Darger's imaginary reader is God himself.

During his stay at Alexian Brothers Hospital, Darger's conflict with God seems to have entered a more radical phase during which their relations were interrupted. While he never doubted the existence of God, he occasionally became sufficiently angry with Him as to break off contact. He tells the story, in retrospect, of this final act of rebellion.

While working at St. Joseph's Hospital and then at Alexian Hospital, I got on me a very mean streak because of prayers not being answered, an a question over the snow. Before this happened I was a daily attendant at mass and Holy Communion. Then foolishly and very sinfully I stopped going to mass and Holy Communion, and when work was unusually heavy at both places, I badly sang awfully blasphemous words at God for hours without stopping. I am surprised that for the words I sang God did not strike me. But no he did not. I believe he knew that there was a time coming when I would wisely change my ways. It did happen. It was while I was working in the bandage room ... In some sort of a magazine I read of a young fellow

who when loosing his fortune, he turned bandit and robbed and killed at will ... when he died he went to hell and was tormented horribly by fiends. There was not only descriptions of the story, but as many pictures. The pictures of his torments in the fires of hell, and by the demons, scared me into repentance and I stayed good and after confession, have been going to daily mass and confession frequently and also daily communion ever since.²⁸⁴

Darger's working life in Chicago hospitals ended in 1963. He had worked without serious interruption for fifty-four years; he was now seventy-one years old. During all that time he supported himself and lived a self-reliant existence, never becoming dependent on welfare or charity — no small accomplishment for a boy from an asylum for feeble-minded children. He describes the events which forced him, early in November of 1963, to bring his work at the Alexian Brothers Hospital to an end.

One morning up at or in the bandage room with Joe, my right leg began again while I was rolling hot packs, and it became so terribly severe, that I could not stand on it, and to add to my misery my right side acted up severely at the same time ... I went to a hospital doctor, who gave me the prescription for some pills for my leg trouble and told me I got to retire if I don't want to be bed ridden ... I came first to tell Joe I got to retire, and then the personnel manager and got the checks coming to me. I retired November 19, 1963.²⁸⁵

During the years at Alexian Brothers, Darger continued to live at 851 Webster in two small rooms which were slowly filling to bursting with years of accumulated newspapers and junk. In 1956 the property was sold, and Henry endured a brief period of anxiety because of his fear that he would be asked to move. The new owner, Nathan Lerner, was a tolerant man who understood and accepted Henry's uniqueness and limitations, and he was permitted to stay.

Neither Lerner, nor any other tenant who shared the building, had any memory of hearing the sound of typing coming from the room in which Darger lived, though other peculiar sounds were a regular feature. The writing of *The Realms* had long since been accomplished and the later manuscripts, well before 1956, were written in longhand. Henry was hard at work on the illustrations for *The Realms* and its sequel, and had been for many years. Yet only once in *The History of My Life* does he mention this surprising aspect of his existence.

To make matters worse now I'm an artist, been one for years, and cannot hardly stand on my feet because of my knee to paint on the top of the long picture. Yet off and on I try, and sit down when ache or pain starts.²⁸⁶

Astonishingly, this is the only reference in his autobiography to any of his creative activities as writer or painter. Clearly it was not this aspect of his reality which inspired his decision to leave a more permanent record of his life. The long pictures to which Darger refers are the collage-drawings on which he had been working since about 1940. The compositions, many of which are 12 feet long, and 2 or 3 feet high, were done on a large oval dining table which stood in the center of the

cramped room.²⁸⁷ They, like the long bandages which Darger worked with at the hospital, had to be moved along the table as he worked. To reach the upper part of the paintings, he undoubtedly had to stand. On one of those pictures, *Images of Men Strangling Children*, Darger added a unique signature, "by the artist HJD."²⁸⁸ (1. 26)

ON SEPARATE SHEETS of paper, Darger kept detailed records concerning his work on the paintings. The earliest of these records dates to November 26, 1954. "Started painting these two pictures November 26th. Finished — Lost two days in painting work because of bad cold. Finished finally February 21, 1955."²⁸⁹ Commonly, Darger recorded the time involved in drawing separately from that needed to add color. "Started drawing new pictures February 22, Finished April 9. Start painting pictures April 10, Finished June 26."²⁹⁰ It was obviously of importance to Darger to distinguish between two distinct phases of his picture-making activity. The drawing of the composition had to be completed before the painting began. "Coloring in" seems to have been an activity derived from coloring books. A single example survives of an unfinished picture without color (1. 25). Sadly, in this list he does not name the pictures on which he was working, nor does he tell us how many he worked on at a given time. A reference to "double pictures" may imply that he was working on both sides of the sheet. "Started painting double pictures on the late afternoon of December 27th, 1958. It took until April 6, 1959 to finish them, the longest time of all pictures yet. Probably 100 days to finish the two pictures."²⁹¹ Other pictures typically involved less time, usually a month or more. "Started drawing new pictures a little ahead of time. Wednesday March 28.

Finished? May 30, Memorial Day 1962.”²⁹² The final entry preserved dates to March 29, 1965, but there is no reason to suppose he stopped painting on that day.²⁹³

In short, during the whole of the time when he was employed at the Alexian Brothers Hospital, he was also at work on the illustrations for *The Realms* and its sequel, *The Vivian Girls in Chicago*. The record between November 26, 1954, and March 29, 1965, is absolutely complete. He began work on a new picture in most cases either on the day he finished the previous one, or at most only a day or two intervened between pictures. His retirement did not interfere with the project, which continued without interruption. Clearly, Darger’s claim to have been an artist for years was not without foundation. Only the fact that his work as a writer and painter belonged to his “other life” precluded discussion of this aspect of his existence in his autobiography. It is nevertheless both surprising and worthy of celebration that Darger knew unequivocally that he was an artist.

The Final Years November 19, 1963–April 13, 1973

I had to quit and the doctor who I went to and examined my leg advised me to retire. I did so depending on my Social Security. I retired November 19, 1963. Have been retired since and I’ll say it is a lazy life and I don’t like it. I suppose a real lazy person would enjoy it.²⁹⁴

DARGER’S WORKING LIFE within the confines of large hospitals had, over the years, provided a necessary counter-balance in his existence. Their firmly established schedules and routines forced him to confine his intensely private and subjective “other world” to specific intervals and situations, allowing for a regular, almost cyclical, pattern of shifting mental states. His ability to maintain, indeed to withstand, this trying alternation of external and internal experience, perception, and activity, provides evidence of his essential mental stability. It is precisely such psychological fluidity, and the precarious balancing of extreme mental states, that is characteristic of the artist.²⁹⁵

The loss of his working life at the end of 1963 may therefore have jeopardized his always tenuous balance. Certainly, the final decade of Darger’s life reveals an increased preoccupation with subjective processes and experience. His physical appearance, his bizarre and compulsive behavior (especially his habit of talking aloud to himself), and the shy and furtive nature of his contacts with people in his environment, all suggest the intensification of dreamlike internal states and an increasing withdrawal from the demands of the world outside his room. His final autobiographical

writings reflect an ongoing struggle to maintain a degree of control sufficient to allow for his continuing existence in the outside world. Despite a now increasingly evident decline in his physical health and stamina, his last huge manuscript, *The History of My Life*, depicts a storm-tossed world embodying extraordinary activity, emotional intensity, and destructive violence. Only in the final months of his life, when he entered St. Augustine’s Home for the Aged, and was no longer writing, was the struggle finally abandoned as he yielded to all but complete isolation and autism.

Retirement also brought about a dramatic worsening of Darger’s financial situation. Dependent on Social Security checks, he now had barely enough to live on. Though his rent had remained unchanged over the years, the fact that he could no longer eat at the hospital had serious implications for his diet.²⁹⁶ Lacking a kitchen in his room, he was forced to rely on local “greasy spoons” for his meals.²⁹⁷

*He used to go to Roma’s Grill quite a bit. I would assume that they kind of didn’t look at the tab. They were concerned about him. There was a time when Henry was sick, when somebody came by from Roma’s just to check to see if Henry was all right.*²⁹⁸

The lack of external supervision, and of money, was also reflected in his appearance as he ceased to look after his clothes or keep himself clean. As he explained: “We Brazilians, we don’t take baths in the middle of winter.”²⁹⁹

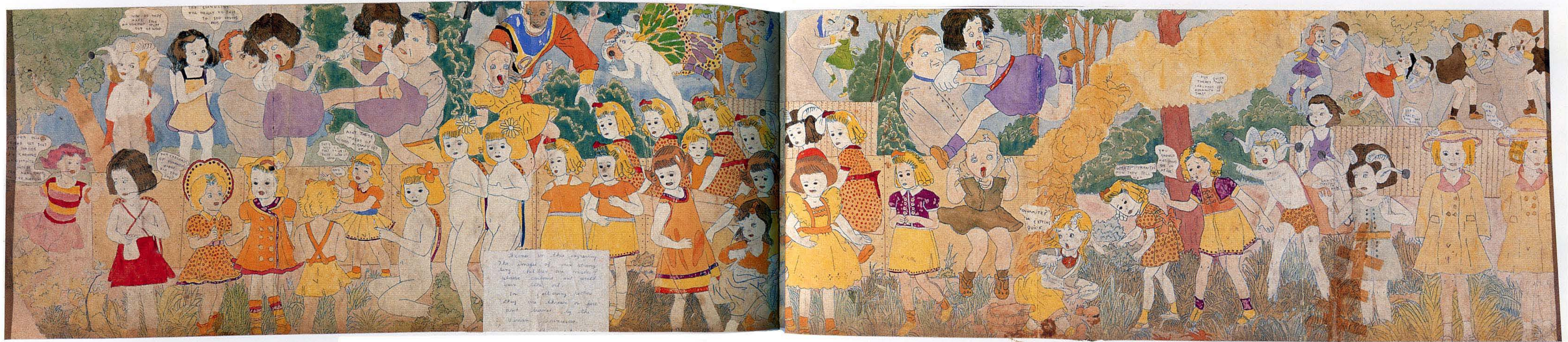
He was no longer required to interact with other workers at the hospital, but the abundance of spare time he now had led coincidentally to increasing, though tenuous, contact with other people: with the tenants in his house, with the



1.25

Henry Darger

Untitled. Collage fragment and pencil. 62 x 259 cm. Collection
de l' Art Brut, Lausanne. CAB 9622 (verso). ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



1.26

Henry Darger

Scenes in this engraving. The images of men strangling children are made of plastic cardboard and would burn like oil. In the following picture they are thrown on fire and burned by the Vivian princesses. By the artist HJD. Collage drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, and collage on paper. 24 x 109 in. The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

priests and other parishioners at St. Vincent's church, and with strangers he encountered on his rambles around the neighborhood.³⁰⁰ He could not be characterized as sociable or talkative, but he seems to have been at least minimally responsive to approaches from other people, particularly if he wanted something from them. Despite his ragged and somewhat bizarre appearance, and his fey and furtive manner, he seems to have attracted certain types of people who responded to him with curiosity and even concern.³⁰¹ To others he was frightening.

*I was young and afraid of this "street person." He was in his own world. I would greet him and he wouldn't respond. I felt he didn't like women, he looked down and avoided my eyes. He scuttled. You didn't know what a person like this might do, but he never did anything. He seemed anxious to get back to his room. I thought he was retarded.*³⁰²

SINCE ITS PURCHASE in 1956 by artist-educator Nathan Lerner, the house at 851 Webster, with its four small apartments, had taken on a somewhat bohemian atmosphere, with art students and models, photographers, and musicians, as tenants.³⁰³ Now in his seventies, Darger found himself part of a small and casually friendly group of young people.

*Henry didn't really fit in. He kept his door locked. He was gone during the day. You'd hear him unlocking and locking his door. We'd say "hello" on the stairs ... Henry was kind of like a mystery, he just came in and out of the room. The room was his domain, and that was it.*³⁰⁴

Yet Henry was unavoidably made aware of the energetic lives of the young people around him — their parties and romances, their fights, arguments, and gossip. "We had a wonderful place there, sort of a community in the four apartments. I had the most fun in my life. It was a lovely happy place, a playground."³⁰⁵

Inevitably, some of these young people became curious about the mysterious lodger in the top floor rear, and sought occasion to make contact with him. His door was often ajar when he was in, and one by one they visited Henry in his amazingly cramped apartment.

*I used to go up and offer him food, tea, cookies. I knew he was cold. It smelled bad in the room. I didn't stay long ... You could hardly go into the room and turn around. He had quite a collection of stuff. In the room it was piled to the ceiling. There was no place to sit unless you sat on the bed. There were two windows and a stained glass. There was a bed, a full length table, and a big chair. The table was so covered with stuff you couldn't tell where anything was. He had a Morris chair. He practically lived in that chair. It sat by the window so he could look out. Henry would sit in the window and look out into the garden ... He didn't come to our barbecues, he didn't socialize with us. We'd send him up plates of food ... A lot of us in the building looked out for him. I remember when he retired, we were all concerned about his retiring ... Henry was living above my apartment. He was a pleasant man. He was very quiet. He didn't make any noise. Nobody ever came to see him. He'd say hello, how are you, thank you, or goodbye, but little else. He wasn't talkative, and seemed very private. We weren't sure he was "all there."*³⁰⁶

Although Darger was withdrawn and generally quiet, everyone in the house was aware that he spent a lot of time in his room talking to himself. The most striking thing was that he obtained a response! Betsy Berglund, who lived on the same floor, recalls:

*I don't know that I was very much aware of him, except that he used to talk to himself. We would hear two different voices ... I know that we could hear conversations. I think his door was usually open. It wasn't really loud. It seemed like there were two voices; a high voice and a low voice, an answer and a refrain. I'm sure that I heard conversations, but I don't remember what they were about.*³⁰⁷

Nathan Lerner also remembers Henry's dramatic dialogues, which unmistakably involved women's voices alternating with his own gruff tones.

*He was a wonderful mimic. I would listen to him. He would mimic the nuns at the hospital. He hated some of his superiors. He would carry on conversations in his room, playing roles.*³⁰⁸

*I heard outbursts, and I would go back there and say, "Henry, do you have somebody with you?" Sometimes it was different voices. He'd throw his voice, to the point you'd think he had one or two people in there. It was very hard to pick out the words, but it was animated, more heated discussions. Out in the hallway it was loud.*³⁰⁹

Many of the neighbors remember Henry sitting outside on the stairs on hot summer days in his shirt with the sleeves cut off. It was while sitting outside one day that his photograph was taken by David Berglund (see Frontispiece).

*John Semlo and I were sitting on the stairs at the time looking at the girls going by. Henry came by and I had my camera in my hand. He sat on the stairs, and I said, "Henry, we've never got a picture of you. Can we take a picture?" He was kind of "Oh, well, no, well ... " And then he kind of backed down, and I took the picture. It was kind of like he didn't want the attention, more than that he didn't want to be photographed.*³¹⁰

ALTHOUGH DARGER'S legs caused him a lot of pain, and he now limped and had to walk with a cane, he forced himself to go out for walks. Sometimes he would be seen in streets and alleys far from home, rifling through garbage cans and trash in search of treasure which he brought back to his room.

In Henry's diary we read: "Suffering leg pains bad enough to make me throw up. Went walking anyway."³¹¹ Five days later he writes: "Not too good with my leg, especially in the early morning. Long walk to cafeteria on Lincoln ave. seemed to help my leg."³¹² At times he couldn't go out. "Suffering bad pains Sunday morning, couldn't hardly walk. Laid nearly all day on the bed."³¹³ Clearly in need of medical attention, Henry was occasionally taken to the doctor, but this too presented problems. David Berglund remembers:

*We got him a doctor's appointment, and I took him. But Henry refused to bathe. The doctor took one look at him and said, "You are to take him home, bathe him, and bring him back in three days." We went home and I bathed him. It was almost like if you had a small kitten and you put it in the tub, and it would kind of mew, mew, mew, and give in. He did not like water at all! He did not like a bath at all!*³¹⁴

Despite the striking intimacy, and the deep level of human compassion and care evident in the Berglunds' concern for their elderly neighbor, when asked about Darger's feelings for them, David stated:

*He felt that we were useful. I don't think there was any emotional attachment ... I have a feeling that his imaginary world was the thing he was closest to, and everything else had a subordinate role. It was his fantasy world that he was going back into all the time, and we were just contact points.*³¹⁵

A CHICAGO ART STUDENT, Andrew J. Epstein, who did a lot of photography in the Lincoln Park area, remembers Darger as a familiar, though anonymous, figure who he often saw wandering on the Northside in the late 1960s.

I'd see him walking and talking to himself. He'd pick up things, and put them in his pocket — bottle caps, packaging. He seemed to like it under the El tracks. I was an art student then. I used to draw on brown wrapping paper, rolls of it. I remember once I was drawing a house. He started to talk to me, telling me he was an artist too. He was fascinated by the rolls of paper.

*I sometimes gave him art supplies, colored pencils, tracing paper ... We started to talk. He didn't really talk, just stared a lot. I used to walk with him, but I never got inside his house. I remember walking there with him one day. It was clear that that was as far as we were going ... He mumbled a lot. He was definitely talking to someone who wasn't there, but then also to me. I just figured he was probably schizophrenic. He was very weird, very strange.*³¹⁶

It is evident that Epstein would very much like to have seen the inside of Darger's room. Those who did so found it to be a strange and unforgettable experience.³¹⁷ [1.27]

*There was a sweet, musty smell in the room. The feeling you got when you went into the room was that the clutter was overwhelming! It wasn't anything you would expect ... there was a tremendous amount of stuff. Things were layered. Newspapers and magazines piled in bundles up to the ceiling. If there was one pair of glasses, there must have been two hundred. Rubber bands, boxes of rubber bands. Shoes, lots of shoes. But you went into the room and it was organized. There was this path through the room. It led from the door, to the desk, to the bed, and around in back. Everything else was just piled and piled and piled. The table was cluttered to a depth of two to three feet, except for a working area. He had all these drawings and pictures across the top. I was interested in art, and a little bit curious, but it was obvious that this was very private, a very private kind of thing. That was the feeling that you had, just the tremendous amount of time and energy that had been poured into that room.*³¹⁸

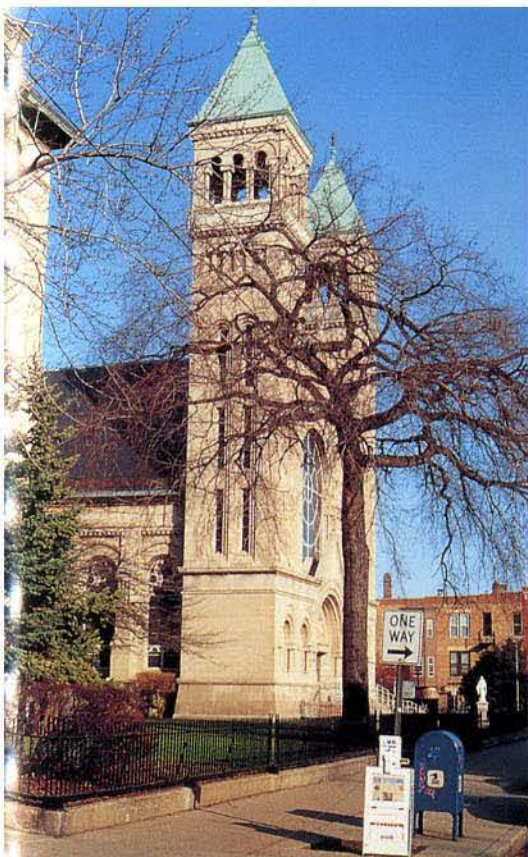
1.27

The interior of
Darger's room, fire-
place wall. Photo-
graph taken shortly
before the destruc-
tion of the room.
Photograph courtesy
of Michael Baruch.



1.28

St. Vincent's Church,
Webster Street.
Photograph by the
author.



HENRY'S WALKS became far less frequent after he was hit by a car.

Saturday June 28 to Thursday September 11, 1969, the long seige of illness from the leg and left hip being bumped by an auto whose driver turned corner without stopping at stop sign.³¹⁹

He was bedridden for several months as a result.

DARGER'S SOCIAL LIFE, to the extent that he had one, centered on the nearby church of St. Vincent de Paul (1.28). After his retirement he began to attend Masses and Communion there with obsessive frequency. Every such attendance was recorded in his diary.

I go to three morning masses and communion at the seven thirty mass everyday and one extra mass on Sunday afternoon at five oclock ... And on Mondays I go to the Miraculous Medal Novena Devotions. It too is followed by a mass ... While at mass at St. Vincent's Church I can I suppose, but dare not stand at standing times, or kneel also and it at times is mighty tiresome sitting all that time ... What did you say? I am being a saint! Ha. Ha. I am one, and a very sorry saint I am. Ha. Ha. How can I be a saint, when I won't stand for trials, bad luck, pains in my knees, or otherwise. I am afraid I was a sort of devil if I may call myself one, during the bad pain of my knee at night.³²⁰

In this final phase, Darger seems to have become more deeply involved in trying to understand something of his life and his reality. He was grappling with intense physical pain and powerful emotions — in particular with tremendous anger. His rage, which could not be restrained when he was in pain, had no outlet other than God. His frequent attendance at church was now unmistakably connected with obsessional incidents of blasphemy, for which he sought forgiveness by going regularly to confession. But in his defiance, in his wild outbursts of swearing at and challenging God, there continued to be a strong element of pride. Each of these "tantrums" was also recorded with diligence in his diaries. Pain often prompted uncontrolled explosions of rage. "Leg bothered too much and hip also. That is why I threw a tantrum most of all."³²¹ Darger seems to have been able to confine these incidents of explosive loss of control to moments when he was alone in his room. He refers to them as "tantrums" though it is far from clear what these events consisted of.

Deeply convinced of the existence of God, he continued to be perfectly capable of threatening Him.

Bad and insulting twards God because he is holding back the rain. I resolved I'll not recite or read all soul's prayer again until it rains. Sorry, I always keep my word.³²²

... angry temper spell with some blasphemies. Almost about to throw the ball at Christ statue — blame him for my bad luck in things. I'm sorry to say so, I'll always be this way, always was and I don't give a damn.³²³

The ball to which Darger refers was a ball of twine. He had become compulsively preoccupied with collecting string, cord, and twine of all kinds, and many of his long walks were taken for this purpose. Huge amounts of his time were devoted to untangling and removing knots from these strings so that he could tie them together and wrap them in large balls. The extent of his preoccupation was reflected in the several hundred balls of twine found in his room after his death.

Went on early morning hike. Found plenty of cord which I balled today. Finished also brown twine. Yet also found on railroad track an abundance of thick white string. Began working on that today. I have enough to take days to finish.³²⁴

The meaning of this activity is unclear, but what is certain is that he blamed God for any difficulty experienced in this task, his frustration at being unable to remove a knot or tangle being expressed in violent outbursts of rage.

Tantrums over difficulty with twine and cord. Defied heaven to make things worse. Threaten to throw ball, and in spite of being at four masses today and Communion. Yet I never stood for things going wrong all my life and under any conditions. No matter what the cost never will.³²⁵

In May of 1968, Darger considered the possibility that his tantrums and his anger with God might be connected with his involvement with untangling string. "Same old tantrum. Will stop working with that twine, then no more tantrums."³²⁶ References to the collecting and disentangling of twine disappear from the diary, but the tantrums continued on an almost daily basis. On December 18, 1968, he announces: "I'm a hard boiled egg, and will always be one."

AT THE END of his life Darger seems to have become interested in tracing some of his feelings and reactions back to childhood. He was well aware that many of his childhood responses to early frustrations were still active in old age, and had always felt himself possessed of a terrible temper which he believed originated in childhood. Largely suppressed in his dealings with the real world, his aggressive drives and his sadism found constant expression in *The Realms*. Only now, in the final years of his life, was he driven through inescapable pain into an awareness of the intensity of his feelings, as alone in his room he grappled with rage. In the autobiographical writings written at that time, he faced himself with astonishing candor.

I have forgot to mention that from the time I was a young boy until even now, I always had a very rough nature or temper, always was and still am self-willed, and also determined that at all costs even at the expense of sin that all things shall

come my way at no matter what might try to interfere or stand in my way ... I really believe it is really naturally in me as I was that way when I was a small boy and no kind of scolding or punishment could change me ... now, because of my sore and lame legs, am still worse and seem to have no way to control myself. I can blow up like a stick of dynamite.³²⁷

He kept careful accounts of all such misbehavior in his diaries, and shared them with the priest when he went to confession. But he couldn't stop. His efforts to understand his difficult nature may have played a part in the decision to write the history of his life.

This work, which occupied his final years, was his only attempt at writing non-fictional historical prose. He made a valiant effort to document the truth as he understood it, so much so that his involvement with the other "unreal" world is omitted entirely. He makes no reference to the huge typed volumes of *The Realms*, the vast accumulations of handwritten manuscript, and the astonishing bound books of illustrations. Had they already ceased to mean anything to him? Or was the divide between his real life and his adventures in the Realms of the Unreal simply too extreme to be crossed? Were his artistic and literary achievements somehow the work of another Henry Darger whose accomplishments could not be spoken of or judged in our world?

What is evident is the sincerity of his attempt to come to grips with the boy and the man he was, his need to record every detail of a life which most of us would consider insignificant. He does so without any attempt at self-aggrandizement, rationalization, or excuses. There is a strikingly matter-of-fact quality to his narrative; a flat, unemotional accounting. Except for his intense, but seemingly brief, infatuation with the idea of adopting a child, he seems to have had no involvement with, indeed no conception of, the future — no wishes and no hope.³²⁸ At the end, as he attempted to write of the present, of his life in retirement, he could find little or nothing to say. His mind and his pen kept returning to earlier days as he added still more forgotten incidents from his early life.

And then suddenly, with no sign whatever, on page 206, he quietly slipped out of reality and, quickening his pace, re-entered the world of fantasy. What is striking is the relative proportion in the book of truth to fantasy. His real life merited only 206 handwritten pages. The remainder of the book, a vast work of the imagination which he nevertheless continued to refer to as *The History of My Life*, was to be 4,878 pages long. The autobiographical portion of *The History* was written in 1968.³²⁹ The longer fantasy section of that work, which Darger later referred to as “a fictional story of a huge huge twister called ‘Sweetie Pie,’” went on being written for many more years.³³⁰

“Reality” was not utterly abandoned, however. Beginning on March 24, 1968, Darger began to keep a diary.³³¹ While the individual entries are very brief, it is clear that he was endeavoring to continue to keep track of reality, recording significant events at the end of each day. Not surprisingly, there was increasingly little to record: the walks he went on and the weather; where and what he ate; his involvement with finding, unraveling, and balling twine, and the furious rage it provoked. He mentions other activities, which we know occupied a lot of his time: pasting cartoons in scrapbooks, and singing.

Darger’s singing, which some of the tenants recalled, seems to have belonged to a relatively conflict-free area of functioning, and to have been an expression of a good day when frustration was at a minimum. “Lots of twine and cord. Not tough tangles this time. Did singing instead of tantrum and swearing ... everything all right today.”³³² At times, Darger sang in more public situations, such as the informal parties Nathan and David arranged for him.

*At the birthday party we asked him to sing. He was very specific. “I can sing some children’s marching songs,” and he sang that.*³³³

*It sounded like real Portuguese. He sang in a foreign language. It sounded so genuine, we believed it.*³³⁴

Another expression of well-being, and indeed of humor, found throughout Henry’s writings and especially frequently in the diaries, is his delight in casually invented word and sound plays — so-called “clang associations.” “Five thirty mass (not gas)”, “Masses and Communion before this, not kiss”, “Write Life History (not mystery)”, and his favorite, “Life, not wife, History. Tee. Hee.” These playful associations, in some cases not without meaning, were seemingly irresistible to Darger, hinting at aspects of his life which did not otherwise find their way into his autobiographical self-portrait. His obvious delight at the spontaneous eruption of these childlike jokes into his mind and work, adds considerably to our perception of his innocent reality.

At the end of almost every day there is the same entry in the diary, “Still writing Life History,” an indication that the artist-writer was still at work. Each day he also tells us how many times he went to church. These two activities now formed the center of his life, interrupted constantly by “tantrums.” These outbursts of rage at God, provoked by the weather, by pain, or by difficult knots in the twine, are also reported as occurring with varying intensity every single day. He describes these explosions in precise detail, usually in conjunction with reports of church attendance. So regularly are these sacred and profane events juxtaposed, that it appears they are, in fact, the purpose of the diary, a kind of positive and negative bookkeeping maintained for the great accountant in the sky.³³⁵

IT IS HIS HANDWRITING which alerts us to the fact that Darger's health was failing. Starting out fairly firmly, it grows smaller and more spidery. Then, suddenly, there are major gaps in the entries and confusion about dates. The final entries are shaky and all but unreadable. We are told why.

From February 1971 to December 1971 — Not much history until October when I had an eye operation of the left one because of a serious infection. And was in bed at home until a little before Christmas because of an [illegible] eye covering for protection placed by the doctor.³³⁶

During this difficult period Darger's neighbors on the third floor, David and Betsy Berglund, looked after him — Betsy making him breakfast, and David preparing dinner.

My other "big relationship" with him was when he was sick. I don't remember how he got sick, but he couldn't get out of bed, and we brought him his breakfast every day ... maybe for two months. I buttered the toast and brought it in to him. I don't know if I brought him something to drink. I don't recall waking him up. I think he was awake when I went in there. He was pretty alert when I was giving him breakfast ... I was in the room, but I just couldn't look at it because it was too messy. I don't know if he ever talked about anything much. I think he was very quiet and very polite, and a little shy I would say.³³⁷

David and Betsy were naturally afraid of Darger becoming overly dependent on them.

So we decided to charge Henry fifteen dollars a week. The idea was that way we wouldn't have inherited somebody forever. Sure enough, after a period of time (about two months), he started complaining about the food, and we figured "He's getting well!" ... The only time he ever argued with us was about the food.³³⁸

During this period of illness the possibility of Henry's going into a home was discussed with him. His response: "I want to live here, I want to die here."³³⁹

THE DECISION to finally leave the room in which he had lived for forty years was made by Darger himself. No longer able to negotiate the two flights of stairs, he asked Nathan Lerner for help in being admitted to St. Augustine's Home for the Aged.³⁴⁰ In a very real sense, the Henry Darger we are seeking to know ceased to exist with his departure from that room on a snowy day in November 1972. It was there that his real life had been led, that "other life" which we have not yet begun to explore. When he left, he left the Realms of the Unreal behind, closing the door for the last time on his life work, the vast dream that had been for all of his life the core of his existence.³⁴¹ Shortly after he had been admitted to St. Augustine's, David Berglund visited him there. The buried world of Darger's paintings had been discovered in the meantime, and David was immensely enthusiastic about them.

I visited him in the home, just once. I looked at him and said, "Henry, you have paintings in the room!" He got this look in his eyes ... it wasn't just the look, it was like I'd taken the wind out of him, and his eyes kind of moistened, and he said, "It's too late now," and he didn't want to talk about it.³⁴²

Later, when Lerner visited him at St. Augustine's, Darger no longer recognized him.³⁴³ All that was left was a shell, an almost catatonic old man sitting alone in the corner of a home for the aged, unresponsive, seemingly unaware. Darger died six months later on April 13, 1973, one day after his eighty-first birthday.³⁴⁴ The final entry in his diary reads as follows:

January 1, 1971. I had a very poor nothing like Christmas. Never had a good Christmas all my life, nor a good new year, and now ... I am very bitter but fortunately not revengeful, though I feel I should be how I am. I am walking the streets and again going to mass as usual. What will it be for me for New Years 1972. God only knows. This year was a very bad one, hope not to repeat.

January 1 1972 — to January 1973
What will it be? —

1.29

Henry Darger

At Wickey Lansinia.
During height of storm
escape by setting it on
fire. Detail. Collage
drawing. Watercolor,
pencil, and carbon on
paper. 19 x 36 1/2 in.
Collection Robert M.
Greenberg, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



2

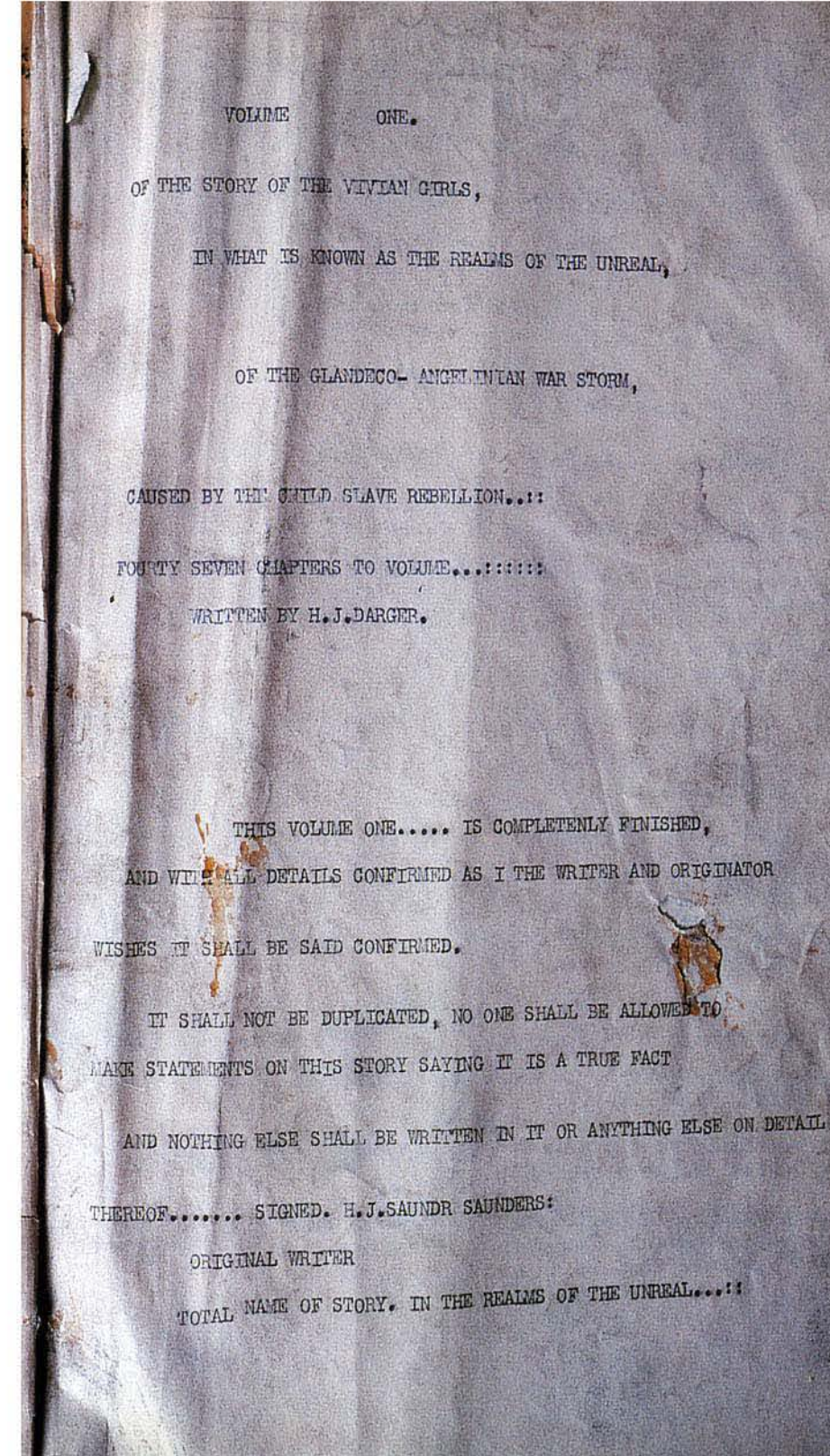


Why lie, why try to put on a literary level something which is the cry of life itself, why give an appearance of fiction to that which is made of the ineradicable substance of the soul, which is like the wail of reality?
—Antonin Artaud²

What cultured people want, in terms of language (and thought), it to use well-defined, correctly positioned and strictly combined terms, and this is what they call good speech, good thought, and good writing. But they do not realize that they are thereby creating a closed circuit that leaves no room for anything but what was there in the first place ... contrary to what cultured people call good writing, it is by forcing the meaning of words, or else by shifting them; it is by twisting their usage; also by derailing coherent thought; it is by injecting gaps, disjointedness, margins, and deviations, that we will produce the sole phenomenon worth seeking: the contribution to thought of outside elements, the excess of the final product over the original stakes.
—Jean Dubuffet³

OUTSIDER STYLE: On The Realms as Writing¹

2.1
Henry Darger
In the Realms of the Unreal, Volume One, title page. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by the author.



On the title page of volume one of the enormous fifteen-volume manuscript, *In the Realms of the Unreal*,⁴ the author inserted a curious prohibition:

This volume one is completely finished, and with all details confirmed as I the writer and originator wishes it shall be said confirmed. It shall not be duplicated, and no one shall be allowed to make statements on this story saying it is a true fact, and nothing else shall be written in it or anything else on detail thereof.⁵

The title, with its allusion to the Realms of the Unreal, establishes emphatically that Darger intended to write a work of fiction, describing events occurring in a purely imaginary and non-existent world. However, unlike most novelists who seek to convince their readers, at least temporarily, of the reality of their imaginative creations, this author seems genuinely worried that someone might doubt the fictional character of his story — might actually insist on its historical reality.

Since no rational reader of *The Realms* would be in any danger of succumbing to such confusion, it seems that Darger feared such a propensity in himself. The title of his history of another world was therefore calculated to avoid or deny the ever present danger in himself of confusing the outer world of reality and the inner world of imagination. Thus, even on the title page, evidence begins to accumulate that this huge work, in form and content, as well as in terms of the mental state underlying its creation, will differ fundamentally from conventional works of fiction.

For us, Darger's "other world" exists exclusively in the external and objective form of an enormous typewritten manuscript accompanied by a series of large painted illustrations. While it also existed in this textual and graphic form for its creator, it coexisted with a far larger and more subjective world of thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and images, which could be found only within Darger himself. We can assume that its overt embodiment in words and pictures represented only the crudest and most incomplete approximation to a vastly richer and persistent internal experience — a private inner world whose disturbing reality Darger felt compelled to deny.

The full title of Darger's creation provides the reader with a clear and very detailed description of his subject:

THE STORY OF THE VIVIAN GIRLS, IN WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL, OF THE GLANDECO-ANGELINIAN WAR STORM CAUSED BY THE CHILD SLAVE REBELLION.⁶ (2.1)

The work is, on the one hand, a novel whose main characters are seven sisters known collectively as the "Vivian girls." It is also a historical chronicle of a war — a war which takes place in an unreal world, the various countries of which possess distinct but unfamiliar names. Also described as a rebellion or uprising, the war is unusual in involving children as protagonists — the child slaves of the title. Presented as a work of fiction, in its form the work owes far more to history writing than to the imaginative constructions of the novelist. It has an atmosphere of journalistic and historical factuality about it which, as we will see, results from an overwhelming abundance of material detail. Underlying its fictional

surface we sense a compelling psychological reality which might seduce the reader into accepting the work as plausible, if not historical.

While totally immersed in it, Darger insisted upon the unreality of his fictional world to fend off any suggestion that he was unable to distinguish between his experience of the external world and images emerging from his mind — to protect himself from the accusation that he was mad.⁷ Many of his attempts at social interaction must have been inhibited by his determination to prove that he was mentally healthy, “like everyone else.” While he seems to have been able to maintain a clear and constant division between his day-to-day existence in the outside world and his subjective awareness of other less real realms, never succumbing to psychotic loss of boundaries between inner and outer, his constant struggle to convince others of his normality would rarely have been successful. The secret writing of *The Realms* over many years, in the face of persistent stigmatization and ridicule, can be understood as an attempt to demonstrate, if only to himself, his intelligence and sanity.

NEVERTHELESS, when he was alone in his room, another reality did assert itself as he entered the Realms of the Unreal, an alternate world which was, despite his denials, vastly more real to him than the frustrating outside world with which he was but minimally involved. Taking over his nighttime existence, filling the vacuum which his barren and meaningless daily experience left in his life, *The Realms* came to possess far greater significance emotionally and intellectually, perhaps even perceptually, than the outer or real world. While such a situation might be thought to apply to many

creative writers, and particularly to novelists engaged over long periods of time in the elaboration of massive fictional worlds, Darger’s creative stance, and the constantly shifting mental states underlying it, differs radically, as I hope to show, from those encountered in most professional writers. The embodiment of this strangely different internal reality in written and pictorial form resulted in an immense work of art whose size, form, and content are unique in world literature.⁸

FACED WITH such a work, we must attempt to lay aside all of our customary assumptions regarding both literary form and the function of writing. Although it can seem, at times, that Darger makes use of familiar literary forms as models (in particular children’s story books, historical writings, and newspaper reports), a more thorough acquaintance with the text makes one aware of the extraordinary originality of his style, its disturbing unfamiliarity and strangeness. Living in early twentieth-century Chicago, Darger was, of course, exposed to literary influences of all kinds, though not generally to the masterpieces of European and American literature. In his writings, as in his pictures, he reveals the influence of a wide range of popular written sources from which he borrows in a variety of ways, occasionally even incorporating long passages adopted from other, usually insignificant, writers. One of our tasks in this chapter will be to describe some of Darger’s major sources, and to characterize his bizarre manner of utilizing them.

The initial impulse of a conventionally educated reader encountering Darger’s manuscript for the first time is to dismiss the whole thing as an example of extremely bad writing, riddled as it is

with spelling and grammatical errors. With greater perseverance, however, one slowly becomes aware of the immense scope and complexity of the work, encompassing, as it does, an entire alternate world in limitless, indeed overwhelming, detail. Oddly consistent, over fifteen volumes (and some twenty years), Darger’s vision was firmly embodied in a profoundly original personal style which draws the helpless reader ever deeper into its labyrinthine densities and curiously unemotional richness.

CONTAINED WITHIN the manuscript, and in associated journals kept by Darger, is considerable evidence concerning his manner of writing. More important are various clues as to the forces at work within the author, irrational drives prompting the continuation of what had become an unpublishable, and indeed unreadable, narrative. An awareness of why Darger felt compelled to write with compulsive persistence will force us to re-examine all of our conventional ideas about the creative process. It is precisely the bizarre and unexpected character of the narrative content and style which lead inevitably to Darger’s internal mental processes — his needs, his vision, his reality. It is easy to dismiss both the work and its underlying motivation as providing evidence of serious psychopathology, but it is essential that we proceed beyond mere diagnosis, allowing ourselves to encounter an astonishingly rich and fertile mind.⁹ As a writer, Darger provides his imaginary reader with an emotional and intellectual experience which in its density, consistency, uniqueness, and power surpasses anything he or she might have anticipated in approaching this astonishing work. This will become more and more apparent when in the later parts of our



investigation we undertake a more detailed examination of dominant themes in *The Realms*: war; natural cataclysms; encounters with human and imaginary beings; and the struggle with God, evil, and inhuman, indeed monstrous, violence. At times, in our attempt to follow Darger into the intricacies of his subjective creation, our objectivity will be profoundly tested as we encounter events of terrifying and perverse cruelty — fantasies verging on madness. Nevertheless, the study of Darger's major themes, as they recur with obsessional regularity throughout the vast narrative both in written and in pictorial form, will carry us much further in the quest for Darger and his reality.

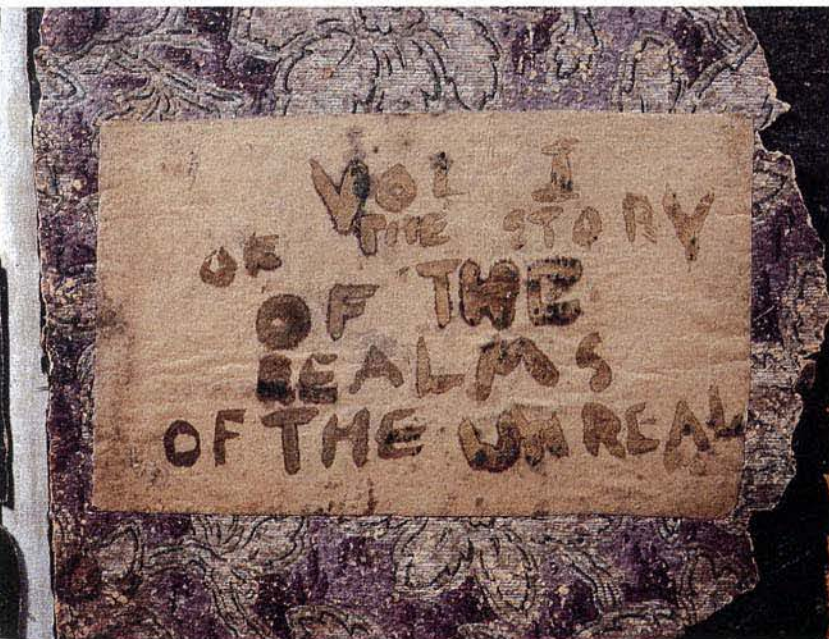
For now, what we are attempting to grasp is a unique, essentially untutored, and completely unconscious, literary style. Beyond that we are perhaps involved in characterizing a larger phenomenon, as yet little examined: Outsider Art as the term pertains to literature rather than the visual arts.¹⁰ Although a final evaluation of the worth of Darger's writing must await its examination by enlightened historians and critics of literature, it should be possible to describe those aspects of his writing which, like his pictorial illustrations, can be seen as belonging firmly within the context of Outsider Art. It is to be hoped that an acquaintance with this undeniably awkward and yet overwhelmingly powerful work will leave the reader with the impression of having penetrated into a unique, disturbing, and astonishingly convincing other world, the Realms of the Unreal.

The Manuscript

Precisely because this huge work, 15,145 pages in length, has never been published, existing only as a typewritten manuscript, it has become the subject of much curiosity and speculation.¹¹ While its painted illustrations have become famous since Darger's death, the book has never been read by anyone, except for very brief excerpts. The unconventional appearance and form of the bindings inspire anyone who has seen the crumbling volumes with a sense of mystery; and the huge piles of loose manuscript make one aware of just how enormous a task awaits any prospective reader (2. 2). It may, therefore, be useful to begin with a description of the nature and physical appearance of the manuscript as it was found at Darger's death.

IN THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL consists of seven hand-bound volumes, accompanied by eight additional volumes in separate piles of numbered pages held together with twine. The pages are of approximately legal size, with the text typed single-space on both sides of the sheets in a variety of hues. There were, as well, three huge separately bound volumes containing the long scroll-like watercolor illustrations for the work.¹² Tragically, the decision was made, soon after the discovery of the manuscripts, to cut the bound volumes of illustrations apart, with the result that the correct sequence of the pictures was lost and their context and significance obscured.¹³

The bizarre character of the bindings alerts the reader to the fact that the content of these huge tomes is unlikely to conform to anything in his previous experience. A complete amateur in the



2.2

In the Realms of the Unreal, the seven bound volumes. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by the author.

2.3

In the Realms of the Unreal, cover of Volume One with title in gold. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by the author.

making of books, Darger invented his own methods and materials, assembling far too many pages in each of the volumes.¹⁴ A wallpaper with a bold floral design, consisting of once-silver leaves and flowers on a purple background, is glued to heavy pieces of cardboard. This patterned outer covering is now cracked and torn, revealing interior layers of black paper, cardboard, newspaper, rags, and glue.

On the front cover a small sheet of brown paper has been glued to the wallpaper surface, and the short title has been crudely brushed over this in metallic gold paint (2.3). The inner cover is painted in shiny black enamel over paper. Lacking a supply of suitable typing paper, Darger collected a variety of abandoned sheets of paper of various weights, and in many different sizes and colors. When he employed lightweight papers, he usually glued two sheets together back to back, to make each individual leaf. As a result of the use of various papers of different sizes, the exposed sides of the volumes are wildly uneven and ragged. He also seems to have had access to used typewriter ribbons of many different colors — blue, black, red, green, purple, etc. — and he employed these in random order, using each in turn until their impression on the page was all but invisible. This, combined with what was probably a two-finger typing technique, produced a wide range of different print tones associated with different keys. Since the papers, now old, have become the color of parchment, this can make the text difficult to read (2.5). The typewriter he used was old and barely functional (2.4). Some of the letters failed to print on occasion, or several letters are superimposed. As a result, Darger's typewriting style is idiosyncratic and easily identifiable.

Long after the text was written, Darger numbered the pages, frequently reversing the numbers or losing count. He regularly introduced new numbering systems, two or three to a page.¹⁵ There is even confusion in the numbering of the individual volumes, with the unbound volumes so inadequately identified that the correct sequence of these later volumes has not yet been established.¹⁶ Small groups of pages were then assembled, glued, and sewn together. He then glued these "folios" into a solid mass along the left edge, reinforcing the book's spine with newspaper or rags soaked in still more glue. Additional layers of newspaper were occasionally included in the spine, a fact that has made it possible in the case of volume six to arrive at the date, July 1932, when it was bound.¹⁷ In that all the volumes use much the same material for binding, it is probable that they were all bound at approximately the same time.¹⁸ Why Darger ceased binding the volumes after the seventh is unclear. His book was far from finished. Perhaps the remaining eight books had not been written at that time, or perhaps the task of binding became too much for him.¹⁹

The huge books, approximately 10 x 14 inches in size, are extremely heavy and awkward to handle. Volume four, which is the largest book, comprising 1,577 pages, is more than 8 inches thick. Even the first volume, the smallest at 644 pages, is over 4 inches thick. The bindings, now more than sixty years old, are extremely fragile, dry, and cracking. The leaves, composed of highly acidic papers, are so brittle that it will soon be impossible to use the books without destroying them.²⁰ Although each of the bound volumes is a unique work of art, they all convey an impression of extreme primitiveness and antiquity. Anyone with a taste



2.4 above
Typewriter owned by Henry Darger, photographed in the room. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by the author.

"I bet that was part of to days war entertainment." Declared Jean who was standing as a near. "No one can tell me such a thing as that could take place without being staged ahead. You know you mentioned Hanley's plan Gertrude." "The generals of the army wouldn't dare." Mildred returned positively. "But our losses of the army is terrible for that short time." "For can't tell what our armies will stand for till it's put to the test." "Retired Jean." It seems to me every one of those refugees were panic stricken over the affair, judging from all the noise crying and screaming they made."

"Gertrude where's your map bag." Mary Stanek asked suddenly. Gertrude looked down at her hands, and then up against in astonishment at her girl scout officer.

"Why," she exclaimed "there is it! I had it in my hand." Then she began an examination of the lean near where she stood. "An examination of the lean near where she stood."

"And my material carrying knapsack is gone." exclaimed Gladys Wentworth. "A missing that startling announcement of Jane Mallfort."

"Line's gone too" was the climax of of exclamations by declaring. Then Joy St. Claire capped the climax of of exclamations by declaring. "Somebody has taken my knapsack, operating the same as you."

"Then there are Glendelins refugees and soldiers." "Increased one of the pickpockets in the crowd of refugees and soldiers." "Increased one of the girls out a short distance away who had discovered that she too had lost her girl scout hand bag which she used to carry military girl scout gear."

Presently another girl scout pickpocket Gertrude's handbag. she turned it over to Gertrude who announced after examining it:

"Funny the money is not missing, for it's here. Then suddenly she began a nervous hurried search in the bag as if moved by the recollection of something vastly more important than a million dollars. The look of despair that came over her face as she took out the last remaining article was sufficient evidence that her search was unsuccessful. With a gasp, she seized Mildred's arm. "What will I ever do. Oh I just find, oh Mildred, it's gone, it's gone. What will I ever do. Oh I just find, it, I must find it, I must find it, or our expedition to Abilene is ruined."

"Oh what's the matter Gertrude, tell me please! What have you lost." Angelina Gibson inquired with not only deep concern but great apprehension moved by her friends agitation.

But Gertrude's distress was even greater than at first. "believed. Fearing that she was about to faint, two of the girls came to her aid. Gertrude's arms to support her. Evidently she was in need of this assistance for her weight rested heavily on them. "Somebody send for a horse and we'll take her to her headquarters." Jean suggested.

No further effort was made at this time to learn what was the strange and mysterious article whose loss had so worried the unhappy girl scout. It was not necessary to send for a horse for others of Gertrude's friends were mounted by the whole population of the entire army not only by the girls and boys and a horse was immediately brought. Jean, Mildred, Mary Stanek, and Gladys accompanied her on their horse to her headquarters. Gertrude rolled on, alternately soon after the horse left the crowded portion of the Christian camp and began a nervous half hysterical discussion of the developments of the day.

"I bet there was a regular army of Glendelins and a lot of crowd of soldiers acting like military pickpockets in this battle." she said. "I'll bet too you'll find that they were scattered all over the camp and worked like bees during the excitement during the Glendelinian assault. You see if a very large number of soldiers and even our scouts were not robbed."

"And to the very thing happened that they needed sound sense. Their work was ruined." "I wonder if it really had happened." said Mildred dubiously. "I can't help feeling that there was something mighty funny in that Glendelinian onslaught. And besides there were soldiers and there too had a good deal of military training at all about schools, and while they didn't exactly make military generals and officers of us because we're not men we know something about it. I'm balancing ourselves under difficulties. I don't believe that attack was made for any other purpose but to take advantage of the general being wounded so they could rush through his lines unless--"

Mildred hesitated. All the other girls stared at her expectantly. "The loss that?" Jean asked. "Unless it was with that plan Gertrude discovered of Hanley to frustrate our purpose of making that expedition to Abilene, and that is why she was also robbed."

"Exactly exactly and nothing else." Mildred replied, just a little relieved at the removal of her of the responsibility for the suddenness of the attack. "But you know Glendelinian generals can take all sorts of other plans on to use." "Reasoned Mary Stanek, who was less inclined to explain."

"Yes and they can do that only after long practice." Mildred answered quickly. "And what Glendelinian general, I don't care how he learned or how he knows his geography can always follow his plan without it being frustrated, without a Christian general being able to throw him off his own guard. I don't believe she even any Glendelinian general can do that, and if he wins a planned assault it might be then only by sheer force of numbers."

"You mean that the whole performance was a faint to rob us all?" Gertrude inquired.

"Not that, but it might have been done to an advantage. But I believe a part of the program was to frustrate our or the plan of Violet's sisters to go to Abilene. I'll bet there'll be a terrible battle today. Listen to the firing will you. I never heard the like. As so many cannon roaring and the yelling, and the explosions of shells. I believe we are in danger."

"I think you are right," said Jean, but I'm afraid in other words that could not be allowed any more to be carried through than any other plan. "Mary Stanek objected. "That I believe, and believe firmly in Hanley has other purposes in view more important, because you know Violet is close by. If Hanley can hurl Abraham's army from Klamor Creek here, Violet will be relieved."

"I think you are right at that," Mildred assented. "But what's the idea of putting a girl with a pigskin fake in the place then, and that every girl scout may be robbed of important papers?" Angelina Gibson asked.

"It might be to give general Myletze an opportunity to give aid to Hanley and prevent general Abraham's move to make a junction with General Myletze and endanger general Hanley's son, and Federal troops. Mildred's explanation. "Surely," Hanley would not deliver an assault like that if that was not the purpose."

"Why I can hardly believe it and don't," Gladys exclaimed. "I firmly believe our expedition is sure to be frustrated unless our side comes off in the battle with Colours flying. If Myletze joins in the attack I'll bet we'll be the ones flying."

"I'm not saying positively that any such audacious trick as that was planned but I won't dismiss the idea until the thing is either fully explained or until the dreadful battle comes to one end or the other." Gertrude declared. "But I was shocked when it saw it necessary that for fifteen minutes straight, the enemy rushed headlong on even though so far these very soldiers in the thousand of their ranks were mowed down for every onward step of the onslaught. I never saw the like. It was dreadful."

Through the excitement none of the girls could think of going to breakfast, for although they had tents pitched and everything in complete order, they now made arrangements for the time being for preparing for all duties that might be assigned to them should they be needed and the equable growl of the enemy's guns and that nothing might hinder them from getting the most possible from the dreadful scene. Moreover to the fact they saw something as sublime as a grand display of fireworks, but the noise there was a terrific crash. It was evident Hanley was preparing to try his weapon, and that the battle was no petty one like the first with Myletze. "I fought recently a few days before. Gertrude recovered rapidly from the nervous shock she had reviewed following her return to her own headquarters. But Abraham's army every one had moved from there from peril of exploding shells in summary with the four girl scout leaders.

"I think I'll stay here with you Gertrude," Mildred announced at the breakfast table. "But I do not feel like eating."

"You don't need to," Gertrude returned quickly. "It's best for you to go on with the other girls, and have a good time watching the progress of the battle. I'll be all right, nothing as the water meter with me--only a little upset, and I have besides a real appetite now."

"But I don't like to leave you here all alone in such times as this." Mildred insisted.

"What does that have to do if you girls were not at home, jump into the flood, think I'm a fish." "Inquired the patient. "I don't want to see the best girls at home on earth here with me always and couldn't save any one from the effects of illness. If it wasn't for her Jean would have really died when wounded in her stomach a few days ago."

for rare and unusual manuscripts is drawn to these huge and crumbling volumes with their musty air of venerable age and mystery.

THE MYSTERY of the volumes is increased when we become aware that no one has ever read them. Given the intense isolation in which Henry lived, it is likely that he never showed them to anyone during his lifetime.²¹ Certainly in the later years of his life no one was aware that he was writing. Prior to their discovery in the room after his death, it is unlikely that anyone had ever seen the bound volumes. There was no evidence surviving in the room to indicate that he sought a publisher or even a reader.²² After his death, separate volumes left the room only on rare occasions, never long enough for anyone to read them in their entirety. Because they are written in an overwhelmingly dense, markedly obsessional and idiosyncratic style, it would require many years to read the complete work. No one has ever made such an investment of time.²³ In some respects the books are all but unreadable, given the strangeness of the style. Indeed, their utterly unique character as writing may stem from the fact that Darger wrote them with the knowledge that they would never be read, perhaps even by himself.

A Basic Overview of the Contents

On the first page of the first volume of his great work, Darger states that his imaginary world is located on another planet.

The scenes of this story as its title indicates, lies among the nations of an unknown or imaginary world or countries, with our earth as their moon ... This imaginary planet is a thousand times as large as our own world, and the largest body of water known as the Angelinian seas, could hold scores of our own worlds, and still have room.²⁴

Apart from this single reference to another planet, the story never assumes any of the characteristics of a work of science fiction. Slightly later, Darger, now a heroic participant in the story, describes his journey by train and then ship to the home of the Vivian girls, and it becomes apparent that the real world and the Realms of the Unreal coexist in relatively close proximity. They are connected by both telegraph lines and mail service, and it takes a month to go from one to the other by boat.

“United States of America?” exclaimed Evans, “Why that’s hundreds of thousands of miles away from Abbieannia across the sea.”²⁵

As we make the journey to the Realms of the Unreal, we soon realize we must leave behind our natural reliance on logic and internal consistency as our guide.

History of a War

Examination of all of the volumes reveals that the work is in its essence the history of a war described, while it is occurring, by a journalist participant — Henry Darger himself. The war involves a host of unfamiliar nations, but is primarily waged by the Roman Catholic nation of Abbieannia (along with its sister states, Calverinia and Angelinia), against the evil rebels of the breakaway state of Glan-delinia and its allies.²⁶ Until the final part of the war, most of the fighting takes place in the state of Calverinia, which is largely destroyed as a result.

The Aronburg Mystery

The central and deeply inscrutable motivation underlying the war, and the writing of the books, is an unresolved problem between Henry Darger and God — the so-called “Aronburg mystery.” It is this mysterious conflict at the heart of the story which raises this puzzling work from historical fiction to a mythological epic, with Darger at times assuming the role of an accusing and threatening Job.

This description of the great war, and its following results, is perhaps the greatest ever written by an author, on the line of any fabulous war, that could ever be entitled, with such a name. The war lasted about four years and seven months in this story, and the author of this book has taken over eleven years in writing out the long and graphic details, and has fought on from day to day in order to win for the christian side this long and bloody war, and though the christians had been threatened with defeat; on account of a strange Aronburg mystery which could not be solved by anyone, not even myself, they finally won when they turned the

tide against the enemy at the frightful battle of Aronburg's Run.

The Aronburg mystery as well as the murder of the Aronburg child, had threatened the doom of the three christian states, for the whole length of the great Glandco-Angelinian war, and it was predicted that the solving of the Aronburg mystery, or for the revenge of her assassins, was the only hope for any chance of the christian nations winning the war. Abbieannia managed to crush Glandelinia herself, after Calverinia had been ruined, and almost destroyed, and the Angelinian nation almost wiped out in her armies.²⁷

Darger's model for this epic clash of nations is readily seen to be the American Civil War. This becomes particularly evident when we realize that the Abbieannian war is also fought over the issue of slavery, though in this case slavery involving children.

In this story for more than forty three years, child slavery existed in the Calverinia country. Hundreds of thousands of children, torn from their parents, were thrown into the horrible factories, made to work themselves to death without getting a cent, and horrors upon horrors almost equaled that of perdition.²⁸

Darger's preoccupation with children used as slaves stems, in part, from his experience of life in an institution for retarded children, and from the exploitation and abuse he endured there. The terrifying destruction, violence, and sadism which characterize this war, and the limitless rage underlying his obsessively detailed account of what are truly monstrous events, are not so easily explained.²⁹

Nature Participates

Given Darger's lifelong interest in extreme weather conditions, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that nature participates in the gigantic conflict, with vast typhoons, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, and forest fires, adding to the chaos of war. These cataclysmic events, described in endless detail over hundreds of pages, take on far greater personality than any of his characters. They erupt unannounced into his story, interrupting the evolving narrative with the irrational force and spontaneity inherent in uncontrolled nature. The terrifying destructive power, and the element of unpredictability, seems to stem from forces within Darger himself which also erupted with unexplained suddenness and intensity. Obsessionally complete accounts of the death and destruction resulting from war and natural catastrophe clearly represent the main theme of his monumental epic, and, indeed, all of his writings.

Blengiglomenean Serpents

Another force of nature encountered in the *Realms of the Unreal* is the Blengiglomenean serpent, a mythological creature possessed of enormous narrative vitality and conviction. These immense, winged, dragon-like beings play a major part in the story. They are also significantly involved in its final outcome. Innocent and gentle when undisturbed, they display a deep love of children, their own as well as the human variety. Possessing knowledge of God, who called them into being, they knowingly favor the Christian side in the war. In the course of the story, the Blengins provide an important source of gentle humor and charm. Some of them possess partly human form — children's heads or bodies, combined with massive tails and richly colored wings.

They are variously described as cute and puppy-like, or surpassingly beautiful, though always potentially dangerous. In their frequent interactions with the Vivian girls, these curious creatures, which are occasionally gifted with the ability to speak and even write, prove themselves devoted friends and enthusiastic participants in adventure. Much of the time they function on a more anonymous level, circling silently high in the sky and watching over the innocent children below. However, when they are provoked by evil Glandelinians, or driven into a frenzy by the mistreatment and torture of slave children, they exhibit truly terrible intensities of destructive rage and murderous violence. At times they appear to function as the long arm of God, reaching into the Realms to right injustice and inflict punishment. Finally, they are revealed as the mechanism conveying God's vengeance against his enemies.

Probably originating early in Henry's life, as a powerful figure in his fantasies, these mysterious and lovable beings embody many of his deepest needs and wishes, and much of his masculinity.

Human Characters

Into this world in chaos Darger introduces a cast of millions, with so many characters identified by name that no possibility exists of keeping track of them. Darger employed lists to remind himself of battles fought (including a careful accounting of numbers of dead and wounded), as well as the names of generals who have been killed or mortally wounded, so as to remember which side was defeated in a given battle and how many victims had been killed on each side.

Only a few individuals in the story manage to emerge as distinct and enduring personalities. It is characteristic of Darger's style, and revealing of his personality, that he was unable to imagine or to create consistent and believable characters, or to conceive of much in the way of personal interaction between people. Characters are described with casual brevity, and they show no sign of evolving over time. Children do not age.

[M]illions of children alone had been carried off, and for forty years, the poor children had lain bound and bleeding in these Glandelinian child slave prisons of horror, imploring for help from bondage seemingly in vain.³⁰

This strange state of affairs is paralleled by Darger's own failure to develop, his entrapment in an unchanging and curiously childlike life pattern and mental state.

The Vivian Girls and Their Friends

Although hundreds of pages are devoted to description of the features, speeches, and activities of the seven Vivian sisters, they remain all but indistinguishable. Dressed identically, and possessed of identical moral values and opinions, they are essentially duplicates of one another. Because of their beauty, perfection, and indestructibility, an air of mystery perpetually hangs over these children, a fact of which they themselves are aware. This is made evident in the first encounter between Darger and the Vivian girls.

[Evans] introduced the little girls to Darger and his members. At first they were overawed at the presence of the little saints, and were at first almost afraid to touch them, but Violet, knowing the reason of their silence, said, "my name is Violet Mary Vivian, and these are my sisters, Joice, Jennie, Angeline, Daisy, Hettie, and Catherine Vivian, real flesh and blood, and not celestial children which no doubt you are mistaking us for. So there is no need to be afraid of us. We cannot help our appearance."³¹

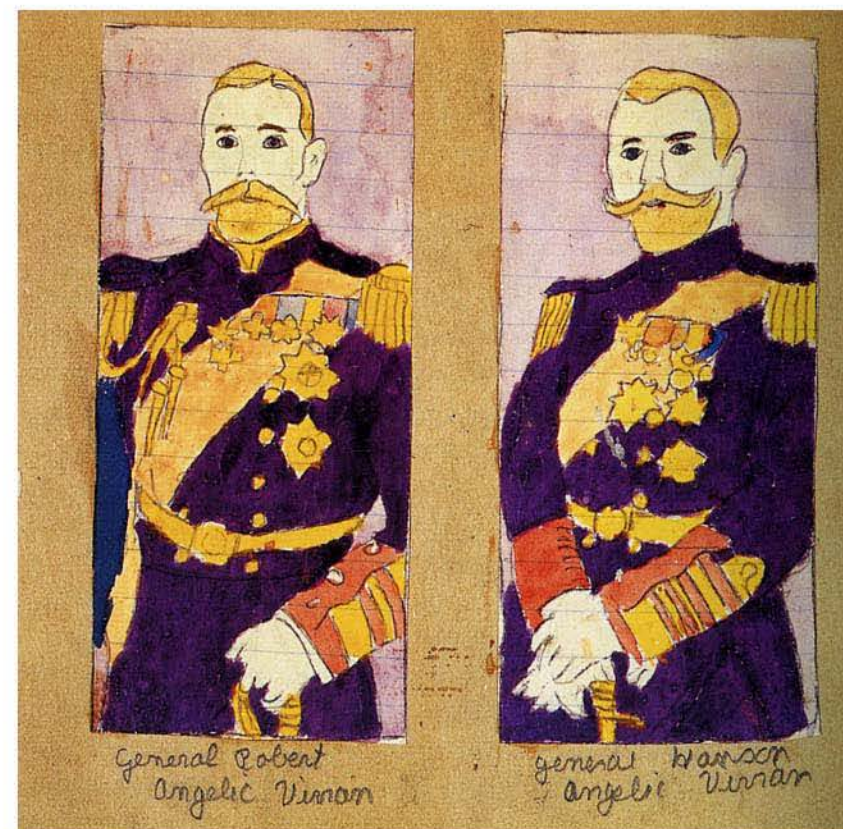
Few adults in the story assume any degree of reality. Writing of the Vivian girls' father (Robert, the Governor of Angelinia) and their uncle (Hanson, the Governor of Calverinia), Darger only manages to make a distinction between them on the basis of their appearance.

Robert Vivian was the most righteous of all the grown folks in the neighborhood, and was tall like his brother Hanson, and had almost the same looks except that Hanson was blond, and his brother had black hair. Both men wore a beard however.³² (2.6)

2.6

Henry Darger

Untitled [Portraits of General Robert Vivian and General Hanson Vivian]. Detail from a larger group of paintings of generals. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



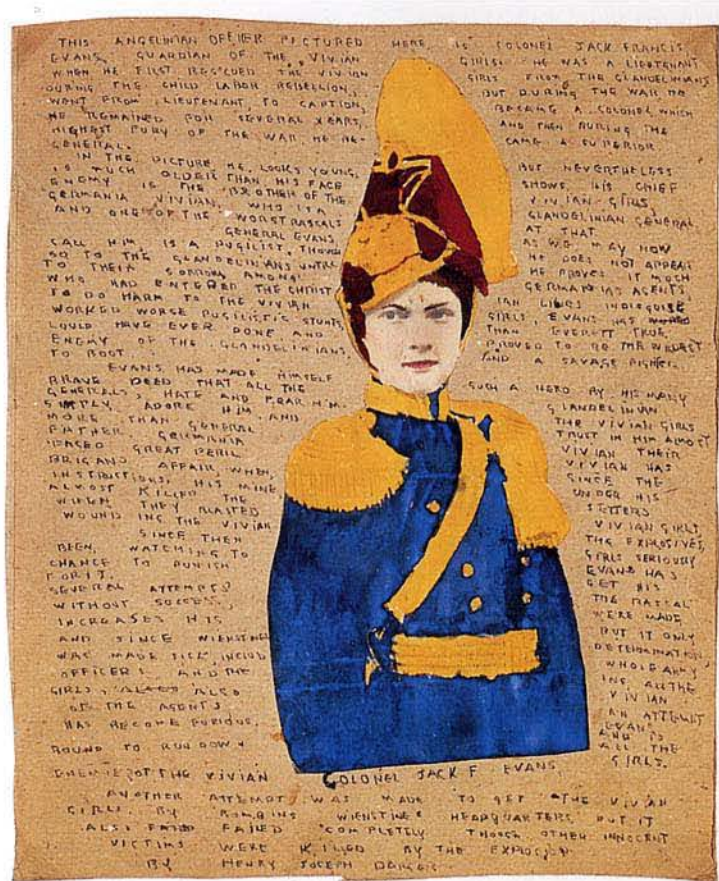
2.7

Henry Darger

Colonel Jack F. Evans.

Watercolor, pencil, ink, and collage on board. 13 3/4 x 11 1/2 in.

Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The most clearly defined of the characters in the book is Jack Evans, boy guardian of the Vivian girls, and Darger's alter ego (2. 7). His energy, heroic deeds, and profound love of his little charges, who he must constantly rescue, imbues him with near magical abilities and enormous appeal. With his physical perfection, his daring in the face of danger, and his easy intimacy with the Vivian girls, he is all that Darger might wish, but could not allow himself, to be. A younger version of Evans is the boy hero Penrod, a character borrowed from the series of children's stories written by Booth Tarkington.³³ Numerous other child heroes, both male and female, accompany the Vivian girls on their adventures as members of child armies of boy and girl scouts, most commonly functioning in the war as spies. Ultimately, it is the Vivian girls who emerge as the central characters in the story, with their beauty the central point of Darger's concern, as he grapples with the difficult task of describing this physical radiance in words.

The Royal and all the Historians of Abbieannia, who if this story had been true, are the finest and most intelligent writers in the world, and know all the big words in any language, have often tried to describe the rare dazzling beauty of the Vivian Girl Princesses and failed, because no one could do so or find words for it. No real writer in the whole world no matter who they are, and I'll put myself in the lead, could describe their beauty if we saw them face to face, so of course I cannot hope to tell the readers how great was the charm of these little Princesses, when they had put all their disguises aside and appeared as their real selves, or how their loveliness can and did put to shame all

the sparkling jewels that the world ever seen, and also magnificent luxury that the world ever possessed. What ever else was beautiful or dainty or delightful faded to nothingness when contrasted with the bewitching faces of the Vivian Girls, and it has often been said by those who know that no other ruler in all the world, nor any children, boys or girls or even women, can ever hope to equal, or ever will equal or even get anywhere near to it, the gracious charm of their manner, loveliness, and righteousness that equaled their features.³⁴

Darger in the Story: The Gemini

Darger wrote himself into the story; indeed at times we are led to believe there are several Henry Joseph Dargers loose in the Realms.³⁵ Early in the story he is summoned to Abbieannia by a letter sent to Chicago by Colonel Jack Evans. Later we discover that he is suspiciously familiar with all of the vast territory known as the Unreal, and in particular with the Glandelinian side. Angry with God, Darger appears to have fought for a time on the side of evil, even threatening to allow the Christians to be defeated in his book. While this violent and vindictive Henry Darger occasionally surfaces, it is as the leader of the "Gemini," an American child protection society, that we first encounter him.³⁶

A young man of sturdy built was on his way toward a three story house in the region of St. Joseph's Hospital on Garfield Avenue. He was alone in a uniform, the olive drab uniform of a soldier of the United States, but he wore the garb of a captain. He was a stern looking man, with a thin brown beard, brownish complexion,

herculean built, and tall enough to embrace six feet. He had a fierce visage full of determination, his hair was light brown, his eyes blue, and if anyone happened to see him looking at them, they would have felt like rushing away for safety at once. He was walking very fast, noticing no one it being Sunday morning.³⁷

Arriving at his gate, Henry encounters his friend William Schloeder, and receives a letter:

Sacramento, Abbieannia,
6694 St. Ann's Street

**To Captain Darger,
Company L,
Camp Logan, Texas.**

Dear Sir;

From two friends of mine I have learned of your ability of terrorizing the enemies of children. You of course must have heard of the great child slave trades going on in Calverinia. Seven beautiful little girls all the dearest friends of mine have suffered untold horrors at the hands of these wicked Glandelinian enemies, tortures which I'm sure you may have heard about. You belong to that powerful society called the Gemini and we request you to come over to Abbieannia if you are permitted, and help the government officials of Abbieannia run down all the enemies of the Vivian girls remaining at large and do something to end the child slave horror. Do this and we will reward you handsomely.

Yours truly,

Colonel Jack Evans³⁸

This marvelous mixture of fact and fiction is typical of *The Realms*, with Darger reinterpreting reality to suit himself. Clearly this passage from early in the first volume could not have been written prior to his enlistment in the military, and indeed is more likely to have been written after his discharge.³⁹ He depicts himself as still in uniform at home in Chicago. Jack Evans is given two addresses, both military camps: "He can be easily located, he is the captain of the 344th Infantry of Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, but now I have heard he went to Camp Logan, Texas."

Writing Chronology of The Realms

In various diaries and journals, Darger states that he began the writing of *The Realms* in 1910, 1911, or 1912, and began typing the manuscript in 1916. In the introduction to volume one, he claims to have spent eleven years in writing the work. We have reasonably solid evidence to suggest that the binding of the first seven volumes occurred in 1932, twenty years after he began writing. There is no certain means of establishing when the unbound bundles of manuscript were written, or for how many years Henry's preoccupation with the writing of *The Realms* continued, but it is not impossible that 1932 marks the end of his first career as a writer, and the beginning of his intensive involvement as illustrator of the books.⁴⁰

Whatever the date of the completion of the text may have been, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that on page 138 of volume one, reference is made to an amazing discovery in Abbieannia — Darger's books!

"I remember one day we found lots of books, pictures of children, and a phonograph with nearly a hundred records while looking for some clue to solve the Aronburg mystery," said Evans. "Have you little girls got them yet?" Soon they had everything on the table. Evans proceeded to examine them ... "He certainly did make a good history of the Glandeco-Abbieannian war" said Evans." ... "What is his name?" asked Evans, "It ain't that man that brooded over the loss of the picture of the murdered Aronburg child?" ... "Ain't his signature in any of the books?" "I didn't see it" answered Evans, "and the story runs up as far as only to the last scenes of the rebellion."⁴¹

Governor Hanson also examines the books and is impressed by them.

I think I'll try to have him sell me these books and I'll have them published. There is a big fortune in these books for him. He could make three hundred thousand dollars on one of them alone, and there is over nineteen of them here.⁴²

It is possible to imagine that when Darger first began writing *The Realms*, he was motivated in part by hopes of becoming a successful writer. The discovery of the completed manuscript in Abbieannia, along with the fantasy of the vast sum of money associated with their possible publication there, implies that Henry's dream of success had been displaced to his alternate world, and now bore the stamp of unreality. The shift from the hope of realistic achievement to fantasies of recognition in another world had not, however, prevented him from continuing with the task of finishing his monumental work. Difficult to explain is the reference in volume one to a history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war in nineteen volumes.⁴³ We must assume either that Henry knew from the beginning the full extent of the work he would carry out, and actually planned to write a work of over 15,000 pages, or that volume one contains material added, by way of an introduction, at the end of the process of writing. Evans's accurate description of the book's contents would support the latter possibility. Paradoxically, the discovery of the manuscript after Henry's death, in Chicago rather than Abbieannia, may eventually result in its publication, in part if not in whole.⁴⁴

The Ideal Reader

One of the most complex problems associated with *The Realms* concerns the question of who the book was written for — did Henry have an audience or an ideal reader in mind? Throughout all of the books he regularly addresses his "dear reader." Obviously he knew that books were written for publication, and often with a specific audience in mind. He employs various devices found in books written at the turn of the twentieth century. He includes a chapter index at the front of most of the volumes, as well as a brief synopsis of the contents at the beginning of each chapter. Some of the volumes begin with a foreword to the reader, written and signed by the author. Volume two, for example, describes his purpose in assembling his history of the great war.

Introduction for Volume Two

As the proceeding days and months roll by, and the awful reverberating echoes of this great Glandico-Abbieannian civil war brought on by thousands of causes besides child slavery and its sorrows begins to shake the whole Abbieannian country from one end to the other and devastates thousands upon thousands of miles of countryside and cities and towns, and slowly increases in fury and maddening madness, the accounts of the humorous stirring scenes mentioned in this volume, we hope will become not only interesting and attractive and as well fascinating reading to the people of our nation, but highly important and valuable, though unreal ... To preserve in most convenient and permanent form these valuable descriptions, and to present to the public

a grandly written description of many of the leading events of the bloody Glandico-Abbieannian war is the sole purpose of volume two ... Neither trouble nor expense has been spared to make this volume perfectly reliable in every way. Editors of great experience will be in due time allowed to go over the whole work most carefully and verify every date of incidents, disasters, battles and great adventures so as to prevent the possibility of an error.

The Author.

Throughout the volumes he addresses little asides and jokes to his readers, as well as longer digressions and explanations. One senses that he is talking to someone, but at the same time it is apparent that this ideal audience is singularly vaguely defined. An aside in volume ten provides us with an indication that his ideal reader is male. "To relieve the reader so he will not have to worry ..." ⁴⁵ Given his intense isolation, it may be that his reader had become a split-off portion of his own psyche, a second self with whom he carried on dialogues, shared his ideas and discoveries, and occasionally made jokes.

Chapter twenty-two button your shoe.

And the battle only raged half a day if to say go and get your pay.

The "tee hee" which appears at the end of such childish attempts at humor, plays on words or sounds, represents the laughter of this "other" responding to Henry's little jokes. However, so much time and effort went into his obsessive involvement with writing that it is unlikely he had much time in which to read his own work.

Literary Models and Sources

Darger set out in the beginning to tell a story, a story which takes the form of a history of a non-existent world at war. Given its length, its fictional character, and the fact that it was written largely in prose, there is an understandable tendency to conceptualize *The Realms* as a novel. However, in many significant ways it fails to take on the character of fiction, or at least of adult fiction. Certainly, Henry never referred to his work as constituting a novel, and it is unlikely that, at the point in his life when he began writing *The Realms*, he had ever read a novel written for adults. Of all the forms of literature easily available to him, this complex literary form seems the most remote from his experience and understanding. Darger generally referred to his work simply as a book. When he was more specific he identified it as a history, specifically the history of a war.

It is possible to point to three major literary sources for his initial attempts at writing: children's adventure stories, histories of the American Civil War, and newspaper prose. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these influences functioned in any normal sense as models for his activity as a writer. Our examination of these sources represents an attempt to grasp something of the strange and awkward manner in which Darger emulated or borrowed from popular literary forms. This is not to criticize Darger, but to indicate how original he was, even on those rare occasions when he attempted to emulate the creations of other writers.

To the extent that he briefly assumed other creative identities — a newspaper man reporting from the battlefield, a weather reporter, a scientific expert on volcanoes or earthquakes, an academic historian documenting the disasters of war, a narrator of children's adventures, etc. — he invariably appears as a naive writer. Untutored and unsophisticated, he betrays his unique spiritual stance at every point. It is this bizarre innocence and originality which make it so difficult to place Darger's prose in any obvious literary category. Certainly his style is, in part, the result of his lack of education. Inspired to write fiction, he betrays an astonishing absence of sophistication. To the extent that he attempted to emulate accepted forms of writing, he does appear as a literary naive. Since, for the most part, he used no model, he was forced to invent not only his story, but writing itself. This is, of course, the case with all of the great masters of writing. Flaubert, Proust, and Joyce were all conscious of reinventing writing, of using language and style to entirely new ends. But they did so with conscious deliberation, aware that they were departing in some respects from established tradition, while at the same time accepting other conventions — for example those associated with grammar and spelling. Darger's unique style was not a matter of choice. Only in the most avant-garde literary experiments of the twentieth century do we encounter eccentric parallels, but Darger lacks the intellectual sophistication that makes these experimental endeavors possible. As we will see, it is only in the vague and amorphous territory of the literary "Outsiders" that Darger might find himself at home.

Unquestionably, we read Darger, and look at his pictures as well, in ways that he certainly never intended and would not have understood. While this is perfectly understandable, our goal in this study must also be to understand his personal way of seeing things and his mode of writing about them. The challenge is to adapt ourselves to a mode of writing that is totally outside of normal experience. A short passage from volume four can serve to make us aware of the difficulties we will face in following Darger into *The Realms*.

Indeed the story of this great tragedy which occurred in Northern Angelinia and Southern Calverinia can never be written as it would have really been had it truthfully occurred. Since the world's worse cataclysm of those terrible three weeks and ten days large forces of faithful men all war correspondents and newspaper men and the Gemini and others have been struggling desperately to convey throughout the nation and even to the whole world itself from time to time as much particulars of the tragedy as possible.

They have written and sent in as much of the reports by wireless and the like but it was impossible for them to tell all and the whole world at best can and will never know all of it for the millions of horrible tragedies written by the flood disaster will forever remain mysteries, and if they had really happened only Eternity could reveal all. Perhaps, at that, is was best that it was so for the horror and anguish of those fatal and fateful days and black nights were mercifully lost in the screaming tempest of shrieks and cries and pleads from all those who were being engulfed

and buried forever beneath the raging billows of the torrent. Only God himself would have known, and therefore for the rest let it remain forever in the boundlessness of his great omniscience.

But if so, the realm of the finity, the weak and staggered senses of mankind may gather only small fragments of the disaster and may strive with the most incompleteness to convey what we say is the merest impression of the saddest and most shocking and astounding story which could have ever engaged the efforts of millions of reporters had they been sent to find out the details.

Poor Calverinia. The mournful dirges of the flood breakers which still lash the shores of its boundaries could never in all the time the real world would continue to exist give expression to the almost world wide sorrow and woe which throbbed there for days and days, and if the sobbing waves and sighing winds of the ocean, God's great funeral choir, fail, how can the weak pen and appalled, thrilled, and excited imaginations of the best and most learned of all writers and story tellers ever perform the task? Not even the very human heart can merely feel what language will never be able to express. And in the case of the survivors of stricken Angelinia and Calverinia the heart must surely break before it can begin to even feel.⁴⁶

Children's Literature

Darger's personal library survives, providing us with an insight into his tastes in literature.⁴⁷ Obtained, at least in part, from his foraging expeditions in the neighborhood trash, and perhaps occasionally from the hospital where he worked, many of the books contain inscriptions, names and addresses not associated with Darger. In a few cases we have evidence that he ordered specific children's books from booksellers, and certainly all the books he most loved, however acquired, bear his name and address on the flyleaf. Despite the largely random process of acquisition, the surviving books clearly reflect a fairly narrow and remarkably persistent taste. The majority are novels written for children dating to the early years of the twentieth century. Almost all are illustrated. Some of them would have been known to him in childhood.

Unmistakably, his favorite writer was Frank L. Baum (1856–1919), author of *The Wizard of Oz*, published in 1900, and the thirteen sequels which appeared between 1904 and 1920. These stories, all set in the alternate world of Oz, represent the single most important source of Darger's conception of storytelling. Darger owned first editions of all of these publications, and seems to have studied them in great detail. Despite the very marked difference in character and feeling of Baum's "other world" when compared with that of *The Realms*, the existence of the imaginary world of Oz, and its continuation over almost twenty years in the various sequels, served as a significant reinforcement for Darger's own activity as a writer involved with the construction of an imaginary other world. His love of making elaborate maps of *The Realms*, with the various countries and cities clearly indi-

cated, was probably inspired by the maps of "the marvelous land Oz" contained in Baum's books (see illustration 8.5). The alternate world depicted in *The Realms* differs from the glittering and playful civilization of Oz in its overall grimness and its overwhelming emphasis on war, destruction, and death. Henry was aware of a mysterious but conscious connection between the world of Oz and his own writing. He played with these alternate worlds, allowing them to mingle briefly in his fantasy, and yet he was keenly aware of the difference.

To make things more interesting I must relate one thing ... I have read many of the beautiful Oz books, and have read that in that kind of a country no one, whether man, woman, or children, or beasts, ever become sick or die ... This was one of the reasons Oz was a fairy land, where also resided the friends of Ozma known as Dorothy, Trot, Betsey-Bobbin, Captain Bill, Bottom-Bright and the others. I was just wondering lately what would the people of Oz do if their country had been somewhere in Calverinia unknown to the Calverinians, and Glinda would see in her great record book, "Great Glandelinian army advancing on the Emerald City. Rebel army pursuing Angelinians. Glandelinian army one hundred million strong."⁴⁸

Despite his love of the Oz books and their fairy-tale world, he was fearful of what would happen should his world with its massive armies and destructive events come into contact with the innocent and peaceful world of the children's story book. "This is not the land of Oz where Dorothy and her Oz friends reside."⁴⁹

Darger often used the names of characters in the Oz books as the names of major cities in *The Realms*. In volume twelve (unbound) we are told:

Meanwhile general Hanson Vivian was not idle either. In the latter part of the beautiful month of December he sent out an expedition to Ozma in the hope of taking Gnome King town ... the army of Hanson reached the Winkie River on the twelfth of December, 1914, when General Beppo Evans was concentrated near Munchkin town ... General Beppo Evans was not at all retreating and was preparing to march on Emerald town.⁵⁰

In his later, post-*Realms*, writings, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, and the Tin Woodman would show up as participants in the story of the tornado which ravishes central Illinois.

The children's books which Darger favored were almost without exception stories with young female heroines — for example the series of Heidi books written by the Swiss author Johanna Spyri.⁵¹ Darger owned five children's stories by this author. Stories of little girls, particularly those who had been lost, abandoned, or adopted, had an obvious appeal to him, on occasion influencing his portrayal of his own heroines. He was well ahead of his time in creating a story whose leading characters are little girls, who surpass boys and even adult males in physical daring, military genius, bravery, and intelligence, while retaining the beauty and charm of little girls. Although boys play a part in the story, they are inferior in all respects to girls. This necessitated constant adjustments in language and in narrative style of a kind only now occurring in children's books. Astonishingly, Darger, or at least the Vivian girls, were aware of the uniqueness of their position as heroines.

The terrifying drama of it all was overwhelming the little girl. Yet amid the chaos of clashing emotions, her ruling passion persisted. And she became agonizing aware that never before had she, nay any little girl or woman in any world's history of wars and other adventures been offered so stupendous a role to play before so vast an audience ... Her stage, the huge devastation theater of a World Record Breaking war, Glandelinians, and Holy God Loving Abbieannia, her audience, all the world looking on from the seats and balconies of the Grand Theatre, and all Kings and Queens.

She giggled hysterically. Fascinated, yet terrified, bewildered instinct urged her to seize the opportunity, and accept everything it offered — every peril, every pang, every great sacrifice, sorrow of parting with her sisters, maybe forever, even the bony embrace of death itself ... Comedy, melodrama, or tragedy, what did it matter, if she for the first time alone were to play the role, the supreme role of the World's History — the greatest of all heroines, the little heroine of heroines.⁵²

One of the unusual features of the children in *The Realms* is their puzzling tendency to disguise themselves as representatives of the opposite sex. The Vivian girls, for example, often appear disguised as Glandelinian boy scouts. Male heroes of children's books also played a part in shaping *The Realms*. Missing from the room and from Henry's collection of books as presently preserved are the marvelous stories of Booth Tarkington concerning his boy hero Penrod Schofield. Darger's no less delightful character Penrod was borrowed from Tarkington's stories, and incorporated as the most important boy hero of *The Realms*. But this Penrod takes on strange and startling characteristics in his new manifestation, gaining immeasurably in interest and complexity. In *The Realms* he also acquires a partner in adventure, the "Rattlesnake Boy," who after hundreds of pages and many volumes is revealed to be a girl heroine in disguise.⁵³

Darger also loved Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and frequently mentions it. Writing in volume one about slavery involving children, he briefly incorporates the character of Little Eva into the story.⁵⁴

"Who are you little girl?" asked general Roswell Buster Johnston. "What do you want in our lines?" The child looked reproachfully at all the generals, and said, "My name is Evangeline St. Clare. I have just escaped from the Glandelinians whom I've been a slave among for ever so long ... I have lived with my father for ten years and saw all kinds of slavery among the poor colored, and they killed poor old Uncle Tom. I'm the same little Eva you have read about and have become a Catholic two

months ago. The child slavery here is worse than the slavery of the poor creatures in the United States ..."

General Vivian and Hanson were amazed at this new visitor, and believed she was only a celestial being, and asked her where she came from. "I was a slave in the stockades of Marcocinio," she answered sadly, "My name is Evangeline St. Clare." Both generals looked at each other. "Sure, you must have come from heaven," said general Hanson. Did you not die from consumption?" "I nearly did, though the story about me says I did. I did not die, but fainted when the sickness got at its worse (BEG PARDON TO THE WRITER OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN).⁵⁵

Darger also read Dickens, the brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen, but the majority of his books are by completely forgotten authors of sentimental children's novels.

IN THAT ITS CENTRAL characters are children, with a considerable portion of the book's content taken up with the exciting adventures of the seven Vivian sisters, it would not be unreasonable to see the work as initially originating in Darger's mind as a children's storybook, with heroic child heroines intentionally designed to appeal to a younger audience. At various points in his long account of the war, Darger's story suddenly shifts into a playful mode as the children and their doings move into the spotlight, replacing the monstrous activities of adults and the cataclysmic destructiveness of nature unleashed with the innocent deeds and conversations of children. At such moments, *The Realms* is transformed into a delightful adventure story. Darger was capable of writing absolutely

convincing dialogue for his children, with charming passages of banter. In the excerpt which follows, the Vivian girls, having been sent out on a spying expedition by their father, are loose in the Glandelinian camp. As always, they are teetering on the edge of disaster:

At this time the little girls had been hiding in Ambrose Fuller's headquarters and though not a Glandelinian had any idea of it, it was discovered by the little girls that Jennie alone was missing.

"Where's Jennie? Where did she go?" cried Violet softly.

"Why she was here just a minute ago — right by my side," said Joice.

"Oh Jennie, Oh Jennie," cried Violet, but there was no answer. Oh Jennie, OH JENNIE, where are you?" she cried again but of no avail.

"Gee, I hope we have not lost her — we'd never regain her in this crowd of wild Glandelinians," said Catherine, while she and all her sisters looked alarmed.

"Where can she be?" said Hettie.

"I don't know, but I'm sure she's lost," cried Violet, "And if we do much shouting the Glandelinians will hear us and get us before we can be prepared. And it would be just like the gray coated scamps to have seized her no doubt when we were fleeing. What if she is killed? — we would never know — and how would we ever find her in this crowd of searching Glandelinians we have just left. Oh Jennie, Jennie dear, where are you?" But there was no answer.

"I'm sure she's gone!" said little Hettie, trying to be brave — little Jennie who had been standing right by Joice's side, and disappeared. "Some of the Glandelinians must have gotten her."

"It's awful to have this happen, and just at this most critical time when we need her the most," said little Evangeline. "Oh dear, she's been kidnapped, stole by the Glandelinians I know. What if she was murdered in cold blood by the wicked Glandelinians and we would never see her again."

Just at this moment when the little girls were about giving up all hope, Jennie appeared with a pocket full of oranges which she gave to her sisters and stating the cause of her absence.

"I was in the cellar looking for something to eat for me and you," she said. "And we thought sure you had been taken," said Joice. "Thanks be to God that you were not."

It was already ten o'clock in the night, and the little girls all being hungry went down in the cellar, and helped themselves to everything they could find, and crammed their pockets full of bullets, which they found in a drawer, and took two valuable revolvers they saw there, there being at the time no one in the house. The little girls helped themselves to everything they saw and then hearing footsteps below now being on the top floor, they hid under the beds in the generals sleeping quarters ...

In a few minutes, twenty five Glandelinian generals came into the room opposite. What the generals were saying the little girls did not know, but nevertheless they were bound to find out, at whatever cost. Violet and her sisters opened the bedroom door as cautiously as possible, and tiptoed across the hall, and then hearts beating wildly with excitement, they made the long and painful process, toward the room toward which the generals had gone.

Without making a sound they reached the landing of a staircase and stood there for a moment beside a big old clock, listening to the muffled voices or sound of voices below. Half way near the room a flooring board creaked sharply. All sounds from the room below instantly ceased, and for a century of minutes, the little girls crouched against the wall, scarcely daring to breath, their pistols ready for instant use. It was a duel of silence. The only sound was the measured click-clock, click-clock of the old time piece on the landing. After a few more minutes in intense quiet, the murmur of voices continued. The generals felt it was perfectly safe. How could it be possible for any spies to get into this house, infested with many poisonous snakes, left there to guard any exit or entrance which alone would not harm the soldiers, or the officers? And that very afternoon the generals had come around to the back door had it securely fastened, and the windows also so that no one could get in that way, and the rest of the building was well watched. The Glandelinian

generals should worry. The little girls were soon behind the portieres, and listening to the words of the wicked Glandelinian generals.⁵⁶

After hearing all of the plans of the Glandelinian army, and an astonishing *mea culpa* from General Huebaum Manley, the Vivian girls are discovered:

At this moment with a swish the portieres behind the wicked Glandelinian generals parted, and they swung around every muscle set for a rush, and hands at their pistol holders. Just inside the curtains, stood eight of the most beautiful little girls/children dressed in boy scout uniforms who had ever faced them, the brown rumpled boy scout uniforms splotching the blue draperies. From rumpled hair, to firm small feet, every line of the little sturdy figures of the supposed eight little boys radiated complete, furious, and wild defiance. Their blue eyes flashed in indignation and their jaws were firm and square. "You have discovered us too quickly despite our caution," said Joice coolly. "But every one of you Glandelinians are our prisoners instead. Sit down in your chairs." The little girls produced their automatics from behind their backs and leveled them at the wicked Glandelinian generals who were grouped near the table. The Glandelinian generals recognized the ugly blue things, which were leveled at them. They knew the little girls could do some shooting and they were worried.⁵⁷

The children depicted in *The Realms*, and in particular the Vivian sisters, live in the midst of war and natural disasters. Their lives are therefore played out in a context of violence, death, and destruction. They are forced by circumstance to act, not as children, but as skillful survivors well aware of the reality of evil and of violence directed specifically at children. The world Darger depicts, though unquestionably influenced by stories written for children, is not a world that has ever been depicted in children's books. There are hundreds of pages scattered throughout *The Realms*, the unadulterated horror of which would absolutely preclude the book's being read by children, and even some adults. One of the most constant characteristics of the writing is its tendency to shade, almost imperceptibly, from innocence to sadistic violence and outright sexual perversion. Darger may have been unaware of the unsuitability of some of his chapters for any audience. In terms of the monstrous evil which is a recurrent element in the story, his vision surpasses anything previously imagined in literature, anticipating the genocidal reality of the Second World War. His child heroines possess an astonishing capacity to withstand the terrors of hell. Was there a point at which he recognized the fact that his book had ceased to be written for children and had begun to be written exclusively for himself?

History Writing and the American Civil War

Darger's fundamental stance as author of *The Realms* is that of a historian; his conception of history restricted to the scrupulous documentation of war. Paradoxically, his overwhelmingly detailed history concerns a war which occurs only in his imagination. What he documents with such extraordinary precision is a fictional sequence of events taking place exclusively in his inner world. It is legitimate to ask why he was so passionately involved with history, and yet content to describe events taking place in a purely imaginary world.

The essential model for *The Realms* was, without question, historical accounts of the American Civil War (1861–65). Certainly, this was the only area of history in which he seems to have read widely and about which he possessed detailed knowledge.⁵⁸ His intense interest in this war, originating in childhood but persisting throughout his later life, came to represent a central aspect of his identity, providing him with a sense of his own intelligence and self-worth. Had Darger's life unfolded differently, it is easy to imagine him as an academic historian. Tragically, at a crucial moment in his development, his education all but ceased, and any possibility of contact with serious books and with current history was eliminated. Of necessity, he was forced to become the historian of non-existent realms — a chronicler of the imagination. His civil war had been internalized. The war he now invented bore unmistakable similarities to Civil War history, with additional elements derived from his brief period of military training, and from newspaper accounts of the First World War. If, however, we accept his dates for the onset of his activity as historian (1911), these later events played no part in the first years of writing.

In the *Chicago Daily News* during April and May 1911, a long and very elaborate series of daily articles appeared on the history of the American Civil War.⁵⁹ It was on the front page of this paper, on May 9, 1911, that the picture of the murdered child, Elsie Paroubek, appeared. Darger mentions seeing it there sometime in May or June. Given his intense interest in Civil War history, we can probably assume that he was following the series of articles then appearing.⁶⁰ It is not impossible that this exciting reintroduction to Civil War history played a fundamental role in inspiring Darger to begin writing his parallel history of the child-slave uprising.⁶¹ However, it seems likely that, in their origins, the fantasies concerning the military exploits of Captain Henry Joseph Darger in the *Realms of the Unreal* long preceded the onset of his activity as historian and writer.

A detailed examination of Darger's role as historian and illustrator of war in *The Realms of the Unreal* will be undertaken in chapter 4. Here we must consider the nature of his writing about war and, in particular, his strange and inventive transformation of the task of the historian. By far the largest part of his book is devoted to obsessional accounts of battles, described in irrationally elaborate detail. Writing from the field of battle as a participant and eyewitness observer, Darger describes events in which he plays a central part. Utterly lost in perceptual detail, he documents individual battles over the course of hundreds and hundreds of pages. Yet, despite the extraordinary richness and specificity of his accounts of sieges, attacks, retreats, and total routs, written with unusual knowledge of battlefield tactics and activity, his military set pieces remain strangely static and unconvincing. The interminable and

cumulative effect is of a single, endlessly varied sentence being repeated again and again. In the brief quotation which follows, the Glandelinian forces, 1.5 million troops, foot and horse, under general Bicknell Manley, and 5 million Gargoylians, all Wheelers and Scoodlers, led in person by Generals Canson Bicknell, Adele-de-Garbe, Beppo Evans, Izner Myletze, and the evil General Joseph Henry Darger in charge of the Zimmermannian Division, are opposed by the Christian armies led by General Concentinian Aronburg, and Noro Viviania.

General Beppo Evans however soon lost much of the ground he had gained. The Angelinians being reinforced rallied and falling fiercely upon his exhausted troops forced them steadily back to their original position with dreadful loss. Then general Noro Viviania arrived on the scene from a forced march of twenty miles from Dorothy Gale and general Concentinian Aronburg then decided to make a most strong effort to turn the main Glandelinian left wing. In four long lines the Angelinians advanced and poured on over the open field which from the enemies shell fire of grape and shell looked like the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes in a moment. The four immense christian lines of attack was in a short time shattered to fragments by their losses but nevertheless the survivors rushed up with dreadful fury and threw themselves so desperately upon the positions of generals Beppo Evans and Izner Myletze that by the force of the onslaught they broke through like a tidal wave would through a forest of trees and for a few hours it seemed as if they

surely would win the day. But general Joseph Henry Darger's immense Zimmermannian division immediately rushed up to the immense break and managed by the hardest fighting of the siege to keep the christian assailants in check but could not drive them back, and he got severely wounded in the leg by a tree falling on him when it was cut down by a sudden shower of canister and grape. General Concentinian Aronburg being determined at all costs to effectually turn the main Glandelinian left wing, and Adele-de-Garbe being just as desperate and just as determined not to let him do so, these two armies battle with the most extreme and terrible ferocity for nearly four hours, and in the sixteen hand to hand conflicts that ensued during close quarters charges both sides fought savagely face to face like armies of murderous cannibals. The slaughter on both sides was horrible in the extreme, and all through the whole region of Children Knoll for the whole length of fourty miles the death struggle went on until darkness soon put a stop to it. That night the fields for so many miles presented a most dreary desolate sight. The dead and wounded lay everywhere like fallen or cut grain and wheat along every one of the low ridges and slopes and in front of the hastily thrown up works and entrenchments, and hundreds of fires were burning and the wooded territory looked as if a cyclone of terrible violence had torn its way through with dreadful effects. General Adele-de-Garbe spent the horrible night in getting what survived of

his army of troops into a new and more stronger position so as to be ready for his christian enemy if the big battle should be renewed in the morning.⁶²

Curiously unreal, his battles are in essence verbal constructs, essentially literary events. It may be his wildly inflated numbers, and his cavalier approach to death in battle, which makes his descriptions of war so unconvincing. The death of several million soldiers in a single endless battle is for Darger a heroic but nonetheless insignificant statistic. Only the murder or massacre of children is seen as an act of monstrous evil. He responds to the destruction of large cities, horrifying attacks on vast civilian populations, the flight of refugees across the dark land, and the loss of property on a grand scale with the sangfroid of an accountant. Of a single battle Darger writes:

The battle of four days duration ended. The christians had been each succeeding day of the battle been driven ten miles back from their works, but rallied each day behind new positions and fought doggedly until they finally lost over fourty miles of ground and suffered over thirty seven million in killed and fourty in wounded during the whole battle out of one hundred million men. The rebel loss was in total fifty three million two hundred thousand.

"If you increase numbers until they are no longer believable, evil itself becomes a miracle."⁶³

Any attempt to analyze his detailed accounts of specific battles leads inevitably to the discovery that his written descriptions are totally irrational — geographic locations move about the map with the fluidity of water; troops in their hundreds of thousands overwhelm the battlefield, precluding any possibility of rational maneuvers; and victory leaps from side to side with the rapidity of a Ping-Pong ball. It is as if, by allowing himself to be swamped in overwhelming detail and meaningless numbers, he was protected from any contact with his own violence and rage.

Journalism and the Direct Influence of Newspapers

In *The Realms* Darger identifies himself repeatedly as a journalist reporting on the war, one of several identities he assumes in the course of the huge work. He refers to "a war correspondent whose name was Darger who as an eyewitness, told or wrote a story of unparalleled horror."⁶⁴ Henry certainly read the papers, but not as a means of maintaining contact with reality. He sought in newspapers for reflections of his own deeply introverted concerns: accounts of fires, storms, and especially reports of lost children. As well, old papers rescued from the garbage were one of the richest sources of images and ideas which he could absorb into the illustrations of *The Realms*.

Most chapters in *The Realms* appear to have been written in a single evening, describing the events of the day in the other world, exactly as a journalist would do. Much of the time Darger seems to be totally immersed in his war, caught up in day-to-day events of the battlefield, aware only of what was happening immediately around him on the field of battle at that moment. At times he seems to forget he is writing a book at all.

Now I myself would not dare to write down the plans of this very general, if I thought my readers would study them too carefully so as to be able to warn Manley [the leader of the Glandelinians], in case they were favoring his cause and his nations, but it is a fact that no one else in the world except the general (up to the time of this story) had been able to form such an important plan, and so I do not even think it would be safe to give it to my own mother.⁶⁵

At other times he is surprisingly conscious of himself as writer and participant.

The author writes the scenes in this volume as if he often had experienced them himself, as if at one time he is on the side of the foe, at other on that of the christians, then again he is with Penrod and his friends, or with Violet and her sisters, or with christian generals. Some times he writes as if he was actually one of the surviving victims of either flood, fire, or explosion disaster, or fights in battles for one side or another ... Let the reader follow battle after battle with the others, let him follow every event and adventure in the volume and then he can if he sets his mind and heart on it take it on as if he himself was an actual participator.⁶⁶

Inevitably, the style of writing used in Chicago papers in the early part of the century influenced Darger. His style is often consciously journalistic, particularly in terms of his use of abbreviated headlines, followed by a succinct summary of events. He also incorporated bits of information obtained from his reading of newspapers, just as

he would later incorporate drawings obtained from the same source. At times it seems as though he simply is changing names and copying passages from newspapers directly into *The Realms*.

Within a week after the capture of Norma Catherine alone, the whole christian army besieging the place was in possession of a magnificent relief fund that went far toward alleviating the awful mental and physical sufferings of the homeless scores of millions of war refugees. Here therefore is a great social phenomenon that may give pause to all critics who are always want to inveigh against the Angelinian commercial and industrial age. These exhibitions of liberality are not rare in the United States either.⁶⁷

Despite Darger's limited education, he possessed a startling range of information which he acquired on his own, motivated by the extraordinary task which he had taken on. Everything was grist for his mill. The construction of a truly encyclopedic alternate world requires an astonishing capacity for the acquisition of relevant material, often in a situation of extreme intellectual deprivation.⁶⁸

Darger used his writing to prove over and over to himself just how intelligent he was. His style reflects this endeavor in its occasionally awkward formality and its preference for new and unfamiliar words. The extraordinary range of his vocabulary was certainly not acquired in an institution for mentally handicapped children, where the intellectual level of the staff was likely to be only marginally superior to that of the inmates, and in which opportunities for education scarcely existed. He manifests a profound curiosity about, and love

of, words, which he seems to have collected, using them on occasion without any clear idea of their meaning.⁶⁹ In his extraordinary use of the language and in the vast scope of the drama he narrates, he reveals his astonishing intellect on every page. Whatever the nature of Darger's psychological anomalies and educational disadvantage, he was certainly not intellectually impaired.

In some respects, reading *The Realms* is like reading a complete run of a newspaper, watching events emerging with unanticipated suddenness, and then seeing how they unfold and finally disappear. If you follow a newspaper over several years, you begin to see cyclical elements in the news which surface again and again — storms, wars, rebellions, floods, fires — just as they recur as regular features in Darger's thought and in his narrative. *The Realms* is comparable in its extent only to a complete run of a newspaper, many years of which might finally approach 15,000 pages. But, unlike a newspaper, which monitors the changing reality of a city and the world, Darger's activity as a reporter charts changes in his internal world: shifts of mood, primitive drives surfacing from deep within, periods of profound regression and of childish playfulness, and explosions of rage and sadistic impulses. All of the historical events occurring in *The Realms*, even those which he borrowed or adapted, are but reflections of an internal climate fluctuating from day to day within one man.

Religion and Morality in The Realms

Among the books preserved in Darger's library are a number of religious books and tracts testifying to his passionate involvement with his local church and with the teachings of the Roman Catholic faith. Darger's belief in God was overwhelmingly strong and real, his faith profoundly troubled, disturbed, and shaped by the confused and violent forces always active in his psyche. At the core of *The Realms* is a prolonged and terrible struggle with a deeply personal god.

Darger owned many Bibles and prayer books, and read them to the point that they finally fell to pieces. His writing style is marked throughout by the powerful dramatic language and poetic phrasing of the Bible. Many passages in his writing reflect the oratory of sermons, and the naive religiosity of Christian tracts and moral tales. Toward the end of *The Realms*, Darger inserted a truly extraordinary sermon on the scourging of Christ. Undoubtedly borrowed from a published source, this long and terrifying address is skillfully adapted to its new setting, a Mass in the Angelinian camp.

See how willingly and humbly the Lord of Lords surrenders himself and submits to the Godless wretches no more better off in their wickedness than the Glandelinians who are entrenched before you now.⁷⁰

So great is the sadistic violence of this sermon, that one senses its writer, and Darger as well, had become caught up in the sheer excitement of violence for its own sake. For the children in the audience, it is quite an experience.⁷¹

It was the first time that Violet and her sisters had ever heard such a sermon about the scourging of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they felt as if it was the worse thing that ever happened, and only longed bitterly that some Blengiglomenean creature had been there and had interfered.⁷²

Darger's faith was very much that of a child, a holy fool, his morality colored by almost unbelievable naiveté. His child heroines possess the sublime physical beauty, miraculous aura, and perfect innocence of saints. These sometimes irritatingly perfect children, and Darger's own innocent faith as well, were confronted again and again with his overwhelming awareness of the existence of evil.

If this story were true, these, also probably among victims of massacre, disasters and dying child-slaves would be chosen bands in heaven, so like the Holy Innocents, First Flowers of Christ's coming, yet so different, who would be terrible witnesses against all things recorded against the Glandelinians recorded already in these many volumes so far. The child slaves would have been many of the first, the numbers of the others have grown into the many millions scores of millions even. These beauteous bands who either in reality, or in this story, followers of the Lamb withersoever he goeth would have been made up of Dear Children, who might evidently after death, been changed into other Christs, by early communion, and brought our Blessed Lord's intercession in behalf of Abbieannia and her Holy states, and bring such a downfall of a

wicked nation like Glandelinia, that Babylon, Rome, or other wicked countries never experienced, and in a way that would flabbergast the world and astonish all historians, and writers, and all college professors including, I the author.⁷³

It is, indeed, as author of a great religious epic that Darger comes into his own. In the end, his vast mythological construction surpasses any possible contemporary literary source or religious model. He arrives, through his own personal torment and confusion, and his own struggles as a writer, at a curiously awkward but profoundly moving equivalent of *A Pilgrim's Progress* or the Book of Job. Having invented a world awash in evil, confused and enraged by his awareness of injustice and cruelty in himself and in the world, Darger was forced by internal necessity to discover a language of his own, a means of giving voice to his pain. It is the disturbingly original mode of writing he invented which carries us out beyond any possible sources and influences, to the contemplation of true Outsider style.

The Organization of The Realms

The single most important fact about *In the Realms of the Unreal* is its length. This is so, not merely because it is the longest work of fiction ever written, but because its immensity imposes certain unique characteristics on the writing itself, characteristics never before encountered. While it apparently originated in Henry's mind as a book, and continued to be spoken of as such, it is evident that many forces were at work which undermined this conscious intention, focusing his activity in directions which had little or nothing to do with the creation of a readable work of fiction.

To what extent is it possible that Darger actually planned this vast work, knew how it would develop, foresaw the ending? No outline of the work survives, other than the time limit of four years and seven months which Darger imposed on the war. He occasionally makes accurate reference to events occurring in earlier volumes and, more rarely, he anticipates events yet to come. Even the outcome of the war was in doubt. The grave conflict with God, the result of the lost books and pictures, and the threats against Him which resulted, appear, at least for a time, to have made the final ending of the story unpredictable. Immersed in the endless battles and catastrophes which characterize the work, it is in fact impossible for the reader to predict what will happen, or how the war will end, although from time to time, Darger reassuringly states that the forces of good will eventually triumph.⁷⁴

For the most part it seems that Darger allowed the story to unfold from day to day, with each chapter free to develop as it would. The narrative moves so slowly that the reader is unable to maintain any secure awareness of a logical or directed flow of events. Even by keeping detailed notes, it is all but impossible to remember, in even the vaguest sense, what has happened, or to imagine where it may be leading. Too many battles, too many destructive natural events, too many cities besieged or destroyed, too many lists of dead and wounded with their impossibly huge numbers, overwhelm the perceptual apparatus of the reader, who is buried beneath an avalanche of overwhelmingly obsessive and oppressive detail. While to some extent Darger's writing was unplanned, resembling free association in its unstructured form, he did seek to exert at least some control over the material. He clearly realized how impossible it was to manipulate and keep track of the unwieldy mass of information, and he therefore kept separate journals in which lists play a prominent part: lists of battles and their outcome, numbers of dead and wounded, and indexes of generals killed, with a brief indication of the name and circumstances. Only in this way was it possible to see that a general, once dead, did not appear as a living participant in later battles.⁷⁵ Given the vast scope of the work, with its tens of thousands of named participants, it isn't possible for the reader to say whether Darger was invariably successful in this attempt at organization. What is of interest is that he tried to exert control, to maintain his grasp over the overwhelming complexity of *The Realms*.

Time and Space

Having written himself into the story, Darger was caught in the complex situation of being both a participant in the drama, writing in the present tense, and its historian and author, writing in retrospect. Past, present, and future, the period before, during, and after the war, seem utterly confused. If one can visualize a text that is largely determined by the flow of free associations, a narrative which seems to proceed not in a straight line, but continually wheeling in all but plotless circles, and sentences which change direction in mid-course, one has obtained an idea of Darger's unique narrative style. He can be almost impossible to follow as he seesaws back and forth between one imaginary reality and another.

So my dear readers Darger not only saw the beautiful Vivian girls, but recovered little Evan, by force, helped the Abbieannian governments officials so vigorously that within a month not a Glandelinian persecutor of Violet and her sisters were at large in Calverinia and Angelinia, and the meaner cases were banished to the island prisons the others including those held in the internment camps, placed among the others and were forced to build the ruined houses in the city of Calverine to cultivate the ruined fields and farms and so on ... It was general Vivian's purpose to punish the Glandelinians as she well deserved, to punish her in the extreme and the cruelties shown to the Vivian girls and millions of child slaves still at slavery frightfully avenged, and so though war had not yet

been declared Angelinian armies were quickly mobilizing, the Calverinian governments had ceased all the best Glandelinian arsenals, beside one of their navies in Calverinia, and allowed no free use of Calverinian seaports ...

The sorrows of the Vivian girls as it seemed were past, and though they soon saw Calverinia again there was hardly any marks of the terrible devastations caused by the recent rebellion, ruined houses were rebuilt beautiful farms were seen where recently forest fires had swept and even the regions desolated by the battles of the rebellion and so great had the changes become that the little girls would have forgotten the shocking horrors of the past rebellion and would have been leading new lives of happiness with their reunited brothers and parents, Evans and beloved friends if the child slavery instead of getting better was growing worse in the extreme. New buildings had sprung up among the ruined ones in the city of Calverine all scenes of the results of the rebellion was vanishing and everything more like a paradise that what had been witnessed over a year before. The whole world was greatly effected by the quick change in the desolated regions. It was now the month of December 1910. It was believed that with all these prowling rascals gone Glandelinia would reform and become a better nation from the effects at least of the severing of relationships which happened but not so. By June of that coming year (1911) the great battle of Bristol Station had raged and war had

been in full sway ... Everywhere peace and quiet reigned just now where not less than a half a year ago the fiercest Calverinian rebellion the world had seen had been venting its savage rage, and trying to tear the world asunder. All child slavery however had increased despite it all ... Glandelinia deserved all she got and lets hope that she will remember her severe lesson and that even if she does not repent her evil ways she will never fool with the christian nations again. But she did and if it had not been the foolishness of the Northern Calverinians in abandoning Mc-Whirther when it was supposed to be guarded the war so quickly begun would not have raged so long as it did and there would not have been such bloody battles.⁷⁶

As you read *The Realms* you become aware that there are basic themes or characteristic events, which surface over and over again. The vast work is organized around battles or sieges, and descriptions of the massive destruction which results. Cities occupied by enemy troops provide occasion for lengthy accounts of situations of appalling chaos, and for meticulous descriptions of the torture and massacre of children. Natural disasters occasionally replace battles as a source of upheaval and random violence. Interspersed between the more abstract descriptions of battle and its aftermath are chapters dealing with the adventures of the Vivian girls and their friends, their capture by the enemy, and, ultimately, their rescue or escape. Using these basic types of situation, Darger moves from one to the other all but randomly, with themes and even specific stories

coming up over and over. After a hundred pages of text we may well find ourselves back where we were, and we begin again.

The text is, therefore, only superficially a continuous narrative, in that nothing is ever finally dealt with and dismissed. Events and images rise to the surface, and then sink down, only to rise again. Slowly we become aware that Darger's activity as a storyteller is dependent upon internal states of mood or of desire, which surface in his psyche unpredictably, and dictate what is happening at any moment in the volume. (2. 8) The flow of content in Darger is controlled, not by the logic of the narrative, but by internal necessity. Scenes, images, vast natural events, storms, floods, fires, massacres, ruined cities, spring into being in the novel, not because they are necessary to the evolving narrative, but because they are required by temporary, but recurring, psychological needs within the artist himself. As a writer he seems all but unaware that logic must control his narrative, and it certainly doesn't.

2.8

Henry Darger

Untitled. Pencil tracing on manuscript page. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Compulsive Detail

Factual information in most fiction is used to move the story along, to add sufficient detail to construct a convincing setting, to develop distinctive character, and to advance the plot. In Darger's writing it serves such purposes only to a very limited extent. He seems to have possessed no clear awareness that descriptive detail was expected to serve a precise literary goal. His overly concrete and materialistic mind delighted in an endless build-up of material fact for its own sake.

Darger's compulsive thought processes are seen in his limitless preoccupation with practical and material realities. He enters with relish into the task of supplying the armies of both sides with

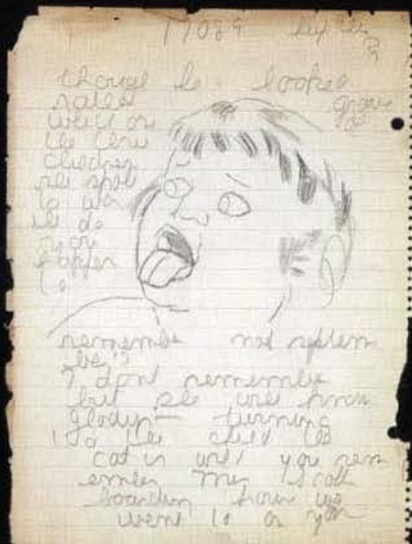
every imaginable necessity, exhibiting the diligence of a general providing for numbers of troops surpassing imagination. Henry seems determined to prove himself capable of assuming vast organizational responsibilities in a world at war, anticipating difficulties and finding solutions even before the need becomes apparent.

The vast army about to move from Schloeder Town was to consist of nearly one hundred million men. To accumulate supplies for such a forward movement in the face of such difficulties demanded more close economy and extraordinary effort than it would take a million of these volumes to describe.⁷⁷

An enormous number of pages are given over to listing and describing material things: items needed, objects destroyed, along with detailed assessments of destruction and of the costs entailed. As is always the case with obsessional thought processes, each solution involves further problems. One can literally watch his mind at work, inventing causes of anxiety, and then finding means of blocking them with elaborate, often ritualized, activity. Although meticulously outlined and carefully planned, the problems described and the solutions arrived at do not necessarily involve reason or logic. For example, although he describes enormous floods extending over thousands of miles of territory, railroads remain the principal means of transporting troops and supplies. But railroads are susceptible to attack by the enemy, so for pages and pages he describes all that is involved in keeping them in order and in use. A single paragraph suggests the character of these extensive passages.

And duplicates of bridges and important trestles were kept in reserve to replace those that were destroyed, each timber also being numbered and fitted ready to be put in place. Despite opposition some of this work was almost marvelous but the grandest achievement of this corps was the replacement of the burned or broken bridges over every branch of the Aronburgs Run or the general stream itself which had been destroyed by the retreating Abbieannian armies. These structures being within the enemies lines could not be duplicated from the storehouses and therefore most of the timber had to be cut out of the forest, even at the risk of being fired upon from ambush, and on either side of the streams. They were sometimes from twelve hundred to eighteen hundred feet long and from eighty nine to nearly two hundred feet high, yet they were replaced even while the workers were under fire in two to six to or ten days.⁷⁸

Darger seems to write, and indeed to think, literally from inside the events which he is describing. While there, lost in detail and surrounded by problems on every side, he is completely oblivious to the development of his story and unaware of the limited capacity of his imaginary reader to withstand such avalanches of detail. We will occasionally see similar obsessional elaboration of detail in his graphic images, where huge scenes are occasionally overrun and finally obscured by the excessive piling up of an infinite number of small forms.



The Creation of an Alternate World

The artist is not heard but overheard.

—John Stuart Mill⁷⁹

As one reads *The Realms* over months and years, there comes a point at which one realizes (despite his occasional asides to the "reader") that this enormous construction was not really intended to be read, but to be inhabited, occupied solely by its author. This is writing that has ceased almost entirely to function as a means of communication: One can hear the lines echoing in the almost empty room, and in their writer's mind. In *The Realms of the Unreal* is not a book, but a place, an ongoing alternate world. Darger, as he wrote, and perhaps long before he began writing, was retreating into an ever deeper and more isolated fantasy existence. The outside world had yielded almost completely to the autistic Realms of the Unreal. Working at his typewriter through the night, on weekends and holidays, had become a means of entrance into another existence in which it was bearable, possible, to live.

All of us retreat for brief periods into fantasy, compensating for the limitations and frustrations of "reality" by inventing precise and richly detailed experiences and encounters. Chiefly sexual, these carefully contrived daydreams also allow for the realization of inhibited ambition, recognition, aggression, even creative strivings. With increased maturity, most of us choose to accept the frustrations and

compromises of a life lived, in exchange for the perfection of a purely imagined existence, lapsing only briefly into that other world which we control.⁸⁰

What happens, however, when the "real" world fails to offer anything which would incline one to be weaned from dependence on imaginary fulfillments? In the absence of a life of any significance, deprived of all validation of self-worth, starved of emotional, social, intellectual, and creative stimulation, and without any possibility of meaningful human closeness or psychological growth, there is a danger of retreat from the frustrating world outside, into a self-created internal realm.⁸¹

In rare and extreme situations a persistent daydream can come to occupy the whole of an existence, with a single and consistent fantasy-construct being evolved over the course of a lifetime. The result is an encyclopedic alternate world imbued with far greater richness, intensity, and sense of being "real" than anything experienced through the senses. While the individual may continue to function minimally in relation to an outside world, his "real" life is in fact only present to him when he is able to withdraw. This seems to have been the case with Henry Darger, with the poverty of his day-to-day experience overwhelmed completely by the luxuriant richness of his fantasy life.

The huge piles of manuscript and drawings left in his room represent little more than the material traces of a lifetime "in" the Realms of the Unreal. *The Realms* represents the night-by-night record of a life lived largely in fantasy. What is unique about it, and about its author, is that his chief mode of being, and acting, in his now primary existence was to write and, later, to draw. These graphic tracings provide, almost accidentally, a primitive embodiment of an otherwise purely internal, and thus invisible, process.

Once we understand that all of Darger's energy and activity were devoted to the elaboration of an alternate world in which he could function adequately and with dignity, the emphasis on the encyclopedic accumulation of facts becomes understandable. While a novel may require a finite and controllable body of descriptive information, the reality of an alternate world is improved by the addition of ever more detail. In fact, the complexity and disorder of *The Realms* surpasses in density our normal perceptual awareness of our own world. Despite Henry's insistence on the unreality of *The Realms*, at least forty years of work were devoted to assembling a truly overwhelming body of evidence, a vast mass of factual detail, testifying to the material existence of these unreal realms.

Humor in The Realms

For the most part, the other world which Henry Darger constructed in the uneventful silence of his room is a grim and terrifying realm. This is slightly less evident in the illustrations to the work, where the adventurous activities of the Vivian girls, and the light-hearted forms and pastel colors, tend somewhat to mask the underlying horror. Similarly relaxed and charming scenes also show up regularly in his writing, with comic interludes interspersed amidst the grim realities of massacre and war. This was not, probably, a consciously contrived literary effect, but rather the result of an internal shift in the author's psychological state. He seems to have functioned, even in his fantasy existence, in two fairly distinct worlds, one of which was certainly that of childhood. There are spontaneous processes of regression evident in *The Realms*, which tend to make themselves felt whenever his child heroines, the Vivian girls and their friends, appear. At such moments, Darger assumes a playful manner, full of good humor and childlike fun.

The writing itself changes when the children are present, coming closer to the children's adventure story which Darger had, in the beginning, set out to write. Despite the fact that he is said never to have been seen to smile or laugh, in his private world Henry possessed a wonderfully naive and playful sense of humor. His humor was, however, so entirely that of a child as to be all but incomprehensible to an adult. He delighted in funny names, senseless word plays, and meaningless associations of sound. Everywhere in *The Realms* this playful side of his personality surfaces, as he amuses himself in creating strange place names (Chesterlollie, Bandedochinia, Pouncee-Cee Woolia,

Julio Callio), wildly irrational personal names for generals (Meldonia Seguinari, Zoe Rae Zwicken-crackers, Tillton Milton, Abie Kabibble, and the "eleven Bicknells" — Hennie and Lessie, Tribune Bicknell, Bicknell Bicknell, Tamerline, Bicknell Ricarke, Meldon Joseph Bicknell, Cooper Bicknell, Canson Bicknell, Bicknell Coln, Hanson Bicknell, and Bicknell Beli Benligilian), all of which he invented out of sheer delight in sound.⁸² There are also military forces or companies of soldiers (Scoodlers, Gargoylians, Growleywoogs, and Zimmermannians).⁸³ His inventive names for storms (Sirocannian, Salablanian, or Spirian Tearian Typhoons), for battles (Latruva, Logan Zoe Rae Run, Porto Red Riding Hood), or for Blengiglome-nean serpents (Freak-winged Oceanic Malferian, Crimecian Gazooks, Dog-headed Gazonian, as well as Crimecerians, Crimemercians, and Crimerceans), seem to have their origins in his own childhood. He invents new words (damanating, Rabrireia, congruous) and variations on old ones (perilious, conflagration, cavarly, tratorious). So extensive is this childlike play with names that entire passages of *The Realms* would be incomprehensible in the absence of detailed knowledge of his invented language.

"This looks like it has been a pretty good school house before it was deserted because of the war," said George, glancing about the apartment. "It would be just the place to play school in general, and teach all our new recruits while we remain here ... "Whose headquarters would it have been if the enemy were here instead of general Aronburg?" asked Jean. "Why it would have been the headquarters of general Limber Cheese, and his staff would have been generals, Skunk, Choke-

me-to-death, and general Knoodle oil, Olive Oil, Castor Oil, Big fish in ze dish, and general Swell De Elegant upper bread crust hard as iron." answered Jack promptly. His disrespect for titles of Glandelinians was sometimes unusually comical if not also insulting and insolent. "General Limber Cheese is also a half brother to general Smelling Bill Poster Paste," he continued. "They ran the Duke De Gook into the sloot one day." Laughingly, the boys and girls greeted this sally.⁸⁴

As amusing as these verbal games are, they provide clear evidence of far from normal psychological functioning.⁸⁵ Aware that he was writing only for himself, Darger obviously felt free to indulge in spontaneous and silly verbal nonsense, yielding, even in the midst of deeply serious passages, to associational impulses which he seemingly could not resist. There are also completely meaningless interjections, which occur with such regularity in the later volumes as to provide evidence of very marked psychopathology.

And the battle raged only half a day if to say go and get your pay.⁸⁶

... the whole scene was beyond any description whatever get a nigger.⁸⁷

A curious phenomenon is the incessant use of the phrase "if you please" at the end of sentences.

Despite the presence of clearly obsessional elements in Darger's unique writing style, there are also lengthy passages, indeed whole sections in some of the volumes, which are truly playful, inventive, and free. While some of these "adventures" may have been borrowed, in part, from other sources, his childlike humor and naive descriptive style transform everything into radiant examples of his own irresistible fantasy. It is these delightful stories which bear the closest resemblance to the most innocent and playful examples of his pictorial style.

A Wonderful Occurrence

Our adventurers were compelled to give expressions of constant delight and surprise as they went on. It was a wonderful sight for them indeed. To the eastward was a mighty peak, which vomited forth lava and clouds of steam and dust which appeared like immense clouds of smoke. Its sides was red with the lava rushing down its sides. At times they could slightly feel the concussion of the distant eruption. To all the existence of this fertile valley hill bound as it was, indeed was a great marvel, but Hanson only knew that this fertile valley could only owe its existence, because these beautiful valleys were warmed by the eternal fires in the bowels of the earth, which were so fierce and hot that the air was reduced to tropical heat surely making this region a perpetual country of summer. The ten explorers traveled on for some more hours ... Finally upon a slight eminence they came, from which a better view of the country could be seen. Directly before them was a tall and isolated peak completely isolated from the other moun-

tains and boarded by the distant sea. Selecting it at once, Robert declared it to be the great Blengiglomenean mountain. They all determined to take a little rest ...

Jack Victor threw off his belt for he was heavily burdened with it. His scalp knife fell from its sheath as he did so. A startled cry escaped his lips as he was about to pick it up and replace it. The cause of Jack Victor's amazement was a most astonishing incident. Because it was made of the purest steel, the clasp knife began to act in a very singular manner. It began to swiftly move away from him without any visible agency to assist it as Jack had reached for it. The sailors though Angelinians were superstitious, and Jack for the moment could ascribe this astounding action of his knife which he had picked up to nothing more than a supernatural agency. He dropped the knife which he had picked up, which again began to quickly glide over the green turf, and a gasping cry escaped his lips. The awe struck sailor recoiled white as a sheep and shivering. With his eyes bulging and his hair seeming to raise from his head he sputtered, "Blow me blubbe, whats the matter with that knife, can anyone tell me? Its taken legs all of a sudden."

One of the other sailors himself had witnessed the incident, and he was scarcely less impressed than his friend. "The Devil is about here, that is the true reckoning," he screeched shrilly. The rest of the men, and even the young lady, and Violet and her sisters, did not show any fear. Both the sailors who were scared looked at each

other and quickly retreated a respectable distance from the travelling knife. Their fear was indeed comical. Understanding the meaning of the phenomena, and also while he was impressed with the marvel, Robert was nevertheless intensely amused at the terror shown by the seamen.

"Ha, ha, ha," he laughed, "Indeed you are brave men. There is nothing supernatural about it. Why it can't even hurt you." Robert went along and picked up the knife as he spoke and handed it to Evans. Jack Victor and his companion at this recovered themselves, and were half ashamed, Jack Victor pulling at his hair and stammering, "Only when I have to face fiends I'm something of a coward. From a fifty gun war frigate or battleship, I'd stand up to a broadside, but from a genuine demon I'd turn tail and run."

"About this you may be sure there is nothing supernatural," declared Evans with a laugh. "No sir," said Jack Victor respectively, "but if I may make free to ask why does that knife hoist sail and walk off by itself?" "Easy enough," replied Hanson himself, "We are now within the vocas of the Blengiglomenean mountain. You cannot have forgotten the wonderful story of the magnetic bodies of the Blengiglomenean serpents, who live in certain caves there?" The look of fear on their faces vanished ... "We are on the right track," said Hanson. "Somewhere in that mountain where the caverns are there are those magnet Blengiglomenean creatures, that make this knife travel by itself." "Of course no doubt," said Robert

Vivian. "Every cave in the mountain is overwhelmingly full of Blengiglomenean creatures. Place the knife on the ground as proof of this." Jack Victor obeyed and almost [at once] the knife began to quickly creep away over the green sward and always in a direct line toward the mountain peak before them. The wonder and amazement of them all cannot be expressed by words. The progress of the knife they were all quite satisfied to watch. "Say Governor," declared Victor, "Suppose we let this knife take its course and follow. Perhaps it will lead us to the caverns of magnet Blengiglomenean creatures themselves." Hanson decided that this would be done and so the knife was allowed to go on of itself.⁸⁸

As we begin to explore the profoundly unconventional, indeed almost magical, function of writing, and later drawing, in Darger's secret life, we will increasingly come to understand and appreciate the otherwise inexplicable strangeness of his written and pictorial style. Entering into his world and mind, we will slowly feel ourselves at home in *The Realms*, able to understand, and even to admire, the curiously appropriate logic with which he assembled words and images. We will be drawn ever deeper by the haunting beauty of his written and pictorial languages. We will also come to see that these languages are mirror images of one another, inevitable expressions of a single, perfectly consistent, style.

When this battle broke out called the battle of Silver Bell the blue abyss of the sky seemed to have yawned over the world more deeply than ever before making one of the fairest and grandest days ever known before. The Glandelinians at Fortress Silver Bell had thought from the unusual quietude that nothing unusual was going to happen but a sudden change touched the beautiful scene ... the swaying shadow of some vast motion. There had been queer sounds far away early in the day and then there had seemed far to the right in front a whole mountain of smoke and debris seemed to rise bodily up at the sky, the wrinkled horizon line of landscapes not far from the christian positions seemed lifted to a straight line, the line far away darkened and approached ... a monstrous, immeasurable fold of purple motion moving as swift as a cloud shadow pursued by sunlight.⁸⁹

Subjective Weather Reports

Except for his years of institutionalization in Lincoln, and a few months in the military, Darger spent all his life in a single neighborhood in Chicago. The brief periods in the summer of 1909 when he escaped from the asylum, and fled on foot across the Illinois countryside, represent the first and probably the only time in his life when he was truly free and on his own. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that these escapades left an overwhelmingly strong impression on him, of changing skies, open space, and light. In his writings far-flung vistas spread out before him as he surveys his world, often looking down from above. He envisions wide plains filled with battling soldiers and rising clouds of dust, distant mountain peaks (usually volcanic), or burning forests rising from vast gray expanses of flood water. Rivers wind across the land, emptying finally into dark seas in which are found islands inhabited only by cave-dwelling Blengiglomenean serpents. Despite the richness of his imagination, it becomes apparent that all of his depictions of nature ultimately depend on descriptions of the sky, and of ever changing effects of clouds or light. The landscape and weather encountered in *The Realms* differ very little from that of Illinois. What is remarkable is the unfailing accuracy of Darger's observations, and the intensity with which he describes the shifting moods of nature, cloud-filled skies, violent summer storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, snowstorms and blizzards, and distant forest fires, with their rising columns of smoke and glowing red skies. His passionate and lifelong involvement with observing and recording weather pervades his writings to the point that nature clearly emerges as a central participant in *The Realms*.

"The storm itself approached with an appalling roar, the smell of sulphur prevailing the air, a cloud burst of rain started with a hissing roar mingled with a torrent of big hail stones, there was a thunder roll that seemed to split the earth and reverberated in millions of echoes, another squall of wind burst with a wailing roar, I heard the rending of timbers, the shrieks of the terrified, and the roar of collapsing walls. The red light still maintaining I saw something like banks of black rolling clouds advancing through McHollester Street toward me amid a deafening crash and conglomeration of roars and booms. It was the wind raising impenetrable clouds of dust from the tearing and rending wreckage. Then the red light disappeared an erebus darkness overshadowing us. At this moment the sky all of a sudden became dazzling bright, a frightful leniar seemed to rend the sky, followed by an earsplitting, earthrending crash, that exceeded all description."⁹⁰

Few writers choose to write about effects of weather with the endless variety, inventiveness, obsessional detail, and poetry found everywhere in Darger's text. But, while his complex portrayal of the natural world betrays an agonizingly acute sensitivity to changing meteorological conditions, it is apparent that he was irrationally drawn to dramatic extremes, with violent nature participating in the war. Weather in *The Realms* clearly corresponds to his internal states of mind, becoming perhaps the most intense and accurate expression of his powerful, but generally inhibited, feelings.

The shifting skies function as a precise barometric indicator of his rapidly changing internal weather. It is this subjective metamorphosis which contributes to the endless variety, spontaneity, and poetic beauty of Darger's weather reports from the Realms of the Unreal, lending emotional intensity to a work otherwise curiously lacking in portrayals of psychological interaction, human feelings, and emotional response.

Objective Tragedy

When faced with the task of portraying human suffering in a world decimated by war and natural catastrophes, Darger sometimes appears bizarrely inept and unsure of how to proceed. Describing human responses to tragedy, he occasionally relied on naive clichés in place of feeling, depending upon the opinions of others. He actually found support for his oddly unemotional approach in the writings of no less an authority than the great American psychologist William James who, surprisingly, he quotes. Writing of survivors flooding into the Christian camp, he attempts to describe their psychological state.

None of them so far as could be observed even acted in the tragic manner, there were no heroics, no histrionic, they did not demean themselves as did people in the Romanticistic novels. I myself have read a psychological explanation on this phenomenon by the late Professor William James who observed these kind of situations which happen in facts and made interesting notes of it at the great San Francisco earthquake calamity. In moments of great

danger, of great strain, and tragedy, people were simple and natural, they did not act in the theatrical sense of the word.⁹¹

A page later and Darger reveals himself to be capable of the most romantic imagery.

There were thousands of galloping horses, riderless, galloping about, a mad blind demonic rage seemed to have laid hold of Germania's men, and they went through the streets, killing, slaying, burning and looting, for those whole three terrible days, while the battle was raging so furiously outside the city ... it was a tragic heginia.⁹²

One senses that Darger's literary aesthetic was faintly flavored by his childhood in the late nineteenth century, and perhaps by memories handed down in his immigrant family.⁹³

The immense and steady stream of hundreds of thousands of weeping refugees from the ruined cities and towns was kept up for fear of the flood resuming its horrible devastation. There was not a departing train that was able to run or any boats and river craft which was not packed to its very platforms. Refugees mostly women and little children continued to leave for many days after. Indeed in the whole world so far probably there was no more sorrowful a sight that anyone could ever imagine or even picture than any presented by these boat loads of refugees when the ropes were suddenly cast off and the crafts swung out into the rivers and away from the desolate cities. There was not a single face that you could see

turned away from the desolate ruin and who could find a single eye which was not motioned with tears or observe a face without tears running down the cheeks. Yet so great had been the rush to leave behind the scene of awful flood that every means was taken to aid them through the devastated regions.

The parting at the trains and watersides and elsewhere were too pitiful to be witnessed. Husbands came to the railroad tracks of the roads or to the gang planks of ships and kissed their weeping wives goodbye and then turning back to the hard work of reconstruction which confronted them with breaking hearts. Thousands of women overcome with grief at the last moment were cared for by strange hands, while those who loved them bound to their home and city by great necessity could do no more than watch them from so afar and pray.⁹⁴

While the convincing depiction of mass human tragedy, or even of simple human feelings of love, fear, or rage, often seems to lie out beyond the parameters of Darger's profoundly autistic style, his vast epic nevertheless possesses extraordinary emotional force and conviction. Ultimately, it becomes apparent that only one psychological reality is truly present in *The Realms*, that of the author himself. In psychological terms, what he has created is an infinitely detailed self-portrait, with every character, every event, each battle and aspect of nature, functioning as a dynamic fragment of his enormously complex and conflicted self. The wonderfully awkward and precise

language he invented, the endless staccato tracings of his typewriter, served only to embody the slow and silent unfolding of a life. The Realms of the Unreal, in all their reality, were to be found within Darger himself.

I will not be able to dare describe the scenes as long as I live, but I will never forget them. Many of the wounded soldiers as well as the unfortunate refugees I knew well in person and these gave me greetings as good friends, but Good God it was nothing but a sad handshake and flowing tears ... I would surely rather plunge a dagger through my heart than endure this awful experience again. I long, I crave for revenge. The readers of all these harrowing news of the papers of this disaster put into newspapers must pardon the personal nature of my own narrative. I cannot help it. It would be utterly impossible to write without becoming a part of this sad story myself.⁹⁵

Any serious investigation of a work of fiction, and especially of one so long that it has never been read, must inevitably come to grips with an obvious but fundamental question: Does this story, extending over 15,000 pages, come to an end? Was Darger able to finish his great work? Did there come a time when he was no longer "in" the Realms of the Unreal?⁹⁶ To the first question there is a simple answer: The great war described in *The Realms* is brought to a conclusion; the Glandelinians are defeated, child slavery ends, and the Vivian girls and their friends resume their innocent childhood in Abbieannia (see chapter 4).

The fact that it was possible for Darger to describe the end of his war might seem to imply that he had ceased to exist in his other world. This was probably not the case. The Glandeco-Abbieannian war was brought to a conclusion in a group of unbound pages initially identified as volume three. However, at some point thereafter, Darger seems to have changed his mind, renumbered the volumes, and then continued working on a whole series of intermediate segments. So, while the outcome of the war was known to him, the struggle was not over, and he remained immersed for many more years in the Realms of the Unreal.

As we will see (in chapter 3), the task of writing *The Realms* was succeeded by the immense work of illustrating it, a project which required years of additional graphic effort. Then, shortly before he retired, Darger resumed writing, producing an additional 10,000 pages of manuscript, including a series of "Weather Books" (1958-67), a largely fictional autobiography, *The History of My Life* (1968-72), as well as a body of handwritten manuscript which involves the continuing adventures of the Vivian girls, now transported to Illinois.⁹⁷ It is, therefore, unlikely that his fantasy existence was interrupted, until the end of his life.

IN ATTEMPTING to characterize Darger's singular style, it has been difficult to avoid lapsing, unintentionally, into either of two evaluative extremes: a descriptive mode that might seem to imply that Darger was all but illiterate, and *The Realms* unreadable; and another stance, clinical rather than critical, which might seem to define his style as exclusively the product of mental illness, and therefore as too remote from our experience to be

worth reading. Neither implication is true, or intended. *In the Realms of the Unreal* is an immensely important, original, and strangely beautiful work of art, one of the great masterpieces of Outsider literature.

Radically unconventional, *The Realms* imposes its own deeply subjective logic, its own awkward and puzzlingly innocent imagery and narrative mode, its own overwhelming density, and an all but timeless momentum.⁹⁸ Darger unwittingly makes extraordinary demands on even the most determined readers, forcing us to examine many comfortable, but ultimately overly restrictive, assumptions about the nature and function of writing.

In the course of the twentieth century we have come to accept complex and challenging modes of writing. We have developed a tolerance for forms of literature which operate by questioning, even undermining, the traditional structure and function of writing, and of language itself.⁹⁹ We readily cope with hermetic subject matter and bizarrely personal form, aware that the creative goals underlying such works may have little or nothing to do with communicating with a conventional reader. In this new creative situation, it is only by reading a book that we are able to sense something of the unique complex of motives which have called it into existence. This is particularly the case with *The Realms*, whose wildly idiosyncratic form, subject matter, and style betray profoundly unconventional creative impulses on every page.

For the sensitive creative writer, or reader, encountering Darger's work for the first time, even a single sentence may represent an astonishing formal invention. Admission to this intensely private realm (still largely closed to all but those fortunate enough to consult the original manuscripts) is an unsettling, and yet profoundly moving, experience. Once the manuscripts are made more widely available, they will undoubtedly inspire the passionate enthusiasm now engendered by Darger's far better-known pictorial illustrations.

Without acknowledging the fact, Darger played God in his alternate creation, giving form over the years to a world rivaling ours in complexity and interest. Astonished by the range of imaginative activity revealed by *The Realms*, we slowly become aware that we are examining a work of genius. Darger's writing embraces an all but unimaginable variety of knowledge and ideas, a vast spectacle surpassing, as he says himself, any war ever described. As historian of the Realms of the Unreal, he follows the complex movements of multiple armies, and describes the logistics involved in supplying their needs. While knowledgeable about an extensive range of battle tactics and equipment, and the mechanisms and goals of warfare, he delights in producing totally irrational mixtures of material derived from the American Civil War and the First World War. He documents, day by day, the complex history of numerous distinct countries, their geography, governments, and peoples. He overwhelms us with historical records: personal and diplomatic correspondence, government reports and statistics, maps, newspaper accounts and headlines, personal memories and anecdotes, etc., each of which is presented in an appropriate written style.

As Hendro Dargar, volcanologist, our author indulges in geographical and geological speculation, describing landforms, extreme weather conditions, and the effect of great floods, earthquakes, and massive forest fires, on whole countries and populations. Obsessed by astonishing images of nature run amok, he becomes involved, as a participant, in curious investigations and debates concerning the causes of natural disasters. He takes us into the interior of the earth, to reveal the workings of volcanoes, and the origins of the earthquakes, floods, and explosions that trouble his alternate world.

Convinced of God's presence in the world, he is driven to question the nature and causes of good and evil. Having created a world in which slavery is a reality, he depicts its demoralizing consequences for the victims, but also for their masters. Entering into an unflinching examination of evil directed toward children, something well within his experience, he describes the monstrous in human nature (and unrecognized in himself), depicting torture, murder, and massacres in agonizingly specific imagery. He writes, with disturbing enthusiasm, of inhuman and meaningless violence inflicted on innocent populations, and of genocidal terror surpassing anything encountered prior to the Second World War.¹⁰⁰ An overview of the subject matter of *The Realms* reveals an astonishing historical record, preserved with a quantity of archival detail seldom ever attempted: an overwhelming accumulation of documentary evidence which, we are continually forced to remind ourselves, was invented out of whole cloth, a truly staggering work of the imagination.

PROLONGED EXPOSURE to Darger's world, while awakening profound respect for its astonishing intellectual scope, its beauty and aesthetic coherence, also leads unavoidably to the recognition that this endless stream of words and images was born from his mind with the same inevitability and force as the feces thrown off from day to day by his body. Darger wrote at the urgent prompting of internal necessity. This observation is not intended to imply that other significant artists do not respond to similarly imperative impulses, but only serves to indicate that in Darger's case the extreme urgency of his creative process, and the compulsive, occasionally violent and destructive, drives underlying it, are everywhere in evidence.¹⁰¹ At no point was his vision arrived at freely, as a spontaneous, or willed, manifestation of creative choice. His written and pictorial products are the direct and unavoidable expression of a strange, irresistibly powerful, and far from normal, mental state. The unique personal style which we have been examining in the context of his writing is unmistakably the product of psychiatric, perhaps even neurological, anomalies which were present throughout his life.¹⁰² This is one of the fundamental characteristics of Outsider Art, and certainly one of the essential aspects motivating our intense attraction to Darger's work. Here again, we encounter a surprising component of twentieth-century literary and artistic response — the deep affinity for subject matter and forms originating in massively altered states of consciousness, not excluding the most remote or psychologically extreme.¹⁰³ Darger opens a new and radically different world to us, a world at times disturbingly alien and even frightening, but never inhuman or

beyond our capacity to respond. His genius lies not in the strange psychological anomalies which shaped so much of his life, but in his rare capacity to embody his unique subjective reality in extraordinarily rich and expressive form.¹⁰⁴ The formidable and exciting task which lies before us is to explore that other world, and the mind which gave it form, in the hope of understanding something of the irresistible creative force which, consuming Darger's life, gave birth, in secrecy, to *The Realms of the Unreal*.

3



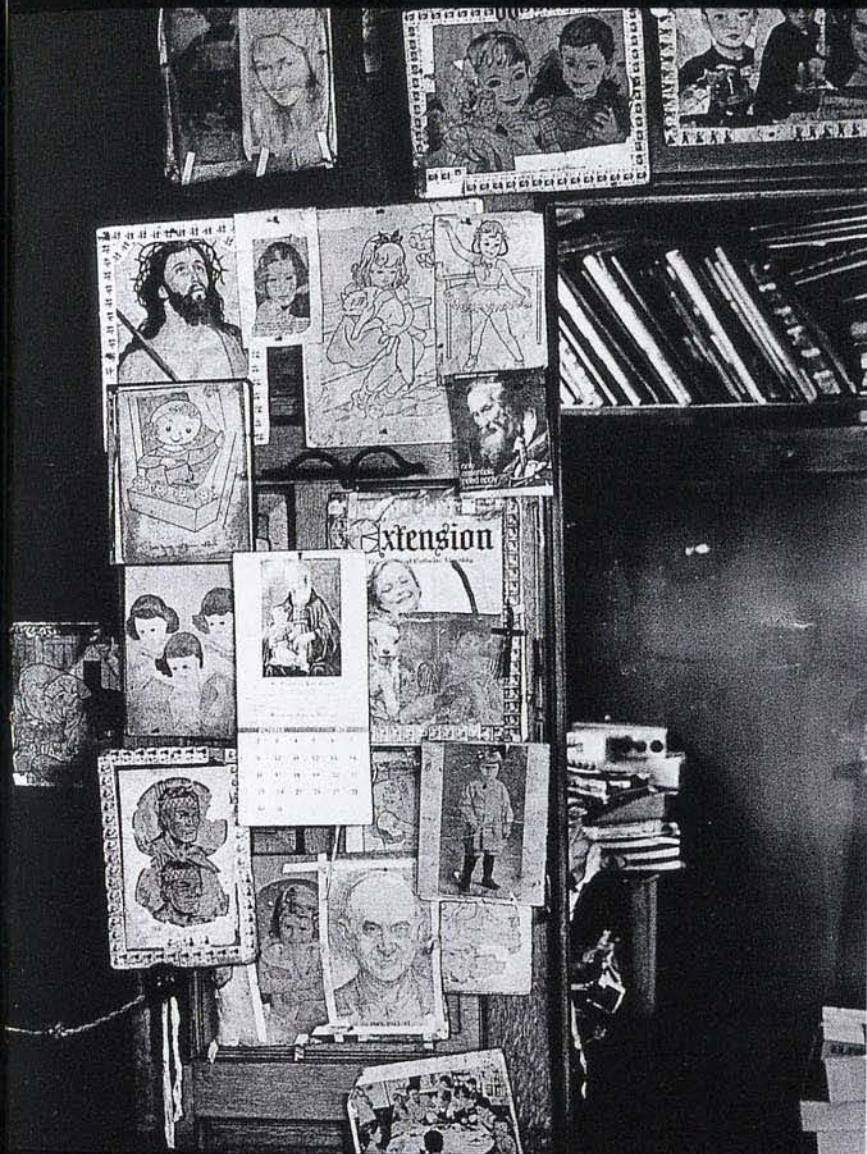
ADOPTED IMAGES: The Invention of the Collage-Drawing

The still point of transition, the no-man's-land between the outside world and the Realms of the Unreal, was Darger's room. In a very real yet obscure way, the room and its imaginary inhabitants engendered Henry's other reality.¹ With the door to the outside closed, he was not alone. To the extent that his imaginary world existed as words, it existed only in his mind and on the type-written pages. However, long before he came to live in the room at 851 Webster Street, he had ceased to be satisfied exclusively with words. As early as 1918, and perhaps earlier still, he had

begun to create pictorial images, evidence, paradoxically, of the reality of the Realms of the Unreal. As a result, over the years the rooms in which he lived were flooded with images of all kinds. The dark walls of the last of these rooms, which he occupied for forty years, were papered over with pictures (3.1). Almost exclusively of faces or figures, the images took possession of the room, altering it slowly in the direction of Henry's private vision. At night especially, the eyes followed him, glittering in the half-light.²

3.1 right
An interior door of Darger's room at 851 Webster Street. Photograph courtesy of David Berglund.

3.2 left
Henry Darger
Untitled [Found picture of Christ with crown of thorns surrounded by Christmas Seals]. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by the author.



Darger had always been a collector of images, long before he began to make his own. For example, he accumulated religious pictures, banal depictions of yet another invisible realm (3.2). More important, scattered throughout the room and all over the walls were pictures of pretty young girls, cut from magazines, newspapers, calendars, and other sources. Had Darger been a more commonplace man, such conventional images, the products of other artists, would probably have been enough for him.

Some of the oldest pictures in the room were framed photographs dating to the late nineteenth century. Some of these may be family photographs, barely discernable records of Henry's vanished childhood, but because of his tendency to acquire framed images from the trash, it is not possible to be sure.³ As well, Henry's "family" had grown over time, enlarged as a result of his active imagination. And so, among the family pictures on the walls were less conventional images in large and elaborate antique frames, individual painted portraits of the Vivian sisters, each one carefully identified (3.3). In his determination that these invisible but celestially beautiful heroines, who had come to play so important a part in his life, should occupy a no less important position in his room, Darger was forced to turn from collecting found images to making his own. Our task is to reconstruct the unique process which led from the collecting of borrowed images to the invention of the collage-drawing. The evidence for this reconstruction was still to be found in Henry's room after his death.⁴

Darger's compulsive need to "collect" almost filled his room and his life. We have already seen the chaotic disorder amidst which he lived. In the later years, even the huge volumes of *The Realms* had disappeared beneath the massive accumulation.⁵ Much of this material was thrown out when the room was cleaned after he died, but enough was saved to provide a representative idea of the original contents.⁶ In order to gain an understanding of Henry's unusual relationship to images, it is necessary that we now explore, more systematically, some of the material which once formed part of the vast collection. We will begin by examining "found pictures;" not those he painted, but the thousands of images which he cut out and saved. We can assume, and in fact easily demonstrate, that each individual picture possessed meaning for him sufficient to necessitate its survival and its presence in the room.

Found Images

All over the room, piled in corners or beneath furniture, were bundles of magazines and newspapers, tied with twine. Henry didn't subscribe to *Life*, *Colliers*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, or the *Chicago Tribune*, etc., he simply acquired random copies from the garbage. These magazines were an important source of significant images.⁷ He cut out every picture which had even the slightest associative connection with his imaginary world.⁸ It seems that even after the significant clippings were removed he had difficulty in throwing out the magazines; everything had to be kept. This curious inhibition amounts, in Henry's case, to an aesthetic principle, influencing the cumulative character of his writing, and the way in which he was later to make images.⁹

The room also contained a modest number of religious texts, novels, and other books casually acquired from Darger's garbage-collecting expeditions. However, his fairly narrow and unconventional tastes in literature and images soon involved him in making his own "books," huge scrapbooks which contained part of his vast clipping files. These curious volumes were usually assembled using a number of children's coloring books, bound together with glue and tape, to make a thick scrapbook into which he then glued selected images.¹⁰ On occasion, he also utilized old telephone books for the same purpose. Most of the surviving scrapbooks were carefully numbered and labeled so as to identify the contents.

One of the passionate enthusiasms of Henry's life was reading newspaper cartoons and comics. His particular favorites among the single-panel cartoons were "Hazel," "They'll Do It Every Time," and "There Ought to Be a Law." Over many years he saved every example of these cartoons, filling thick volumes of his homemade books with these humorous drawings. One such book, for example, is carefully labeled "Book Eight of They'll Do It Every Time and There Ought to Be a Law, haw haw."¹¹ He also loved political cartoons, and several volumes are largely devoted to such clippings. The newspaper comics, in particular "Little Annie Rooney," played a still more important part in his creative life which we will examine in detail. Tied with heavy cords, these bundles of "books" were probably never reopened.

The extent of Darger's collecting and bookmaking activity cannot be exaggerated. Thousands and thousands of cartoons were cut out and pasted, dozens of voluminous scrapbooks resulted. Some of the volumes are completely disorganized, all but random accumulations of clippings. Others are narrow in their choice of images and precise in their labels. One of the smaller scrapbooks contains newspaper photographs and descriptions of fires. Henry's label identifies the contents as "Pictures of Fires big or small in which Firemen or persons lose their lives."¹² (3.4) It is likely that every picture he encountered of such a fire, over years, was entered into this book. In this return to a major interest of his childhood, Darger's earliest and deepest needs surface again. This aspect of his bookmaking is seen to conform to his most primitive preoccupations and drives.

Numerous loose clippings from newspapers of large storms, tornadoes and hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and train wrecks are also preserved. While no scrapbooks dealing with such spectacular events have been found, these images, particularly those depicting extreme weather conditions, could have served as illustrations to another of Darger's large-scale bookmaking efforts, the "Weather Books," which he maintained over many years¹³ (see illustration 1.19). Connections are easily established between various loose clippings and comics, and events described in *The Realms* and in *The History of My Life*. Some of the illustrations may actually have inspired events in the narratives, while others could have served as potential illustrations for stories already written. Comic books occasionally provided Darger with interesting parallels to his own work. For example, the "Classics Illustrated" edition of *Swiss Family Robinson*, which he owned, or the nature studies in *Mark Trail*.





3.3 opposite page Henry Darger

Untitled [Framed portrait of Joyce Vivian]. The fireplace wall of Darger's room at 851 Webster Street. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Nathan Lerner.

3.4 left Henry Darger

Page from scrapbook entitled "Pictures of Fires Big or Small in which Firemen or Persons Loose their Lives." Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.5 left

Found cartoon, "Our bird-watching society will never believe us!" Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.



3.6
Found picture, re-identified by Darger as Mary Evangelinia Gloriana. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

One single-panel cartoon from a magazine touches obliquely on sex, and on Henry's seeming lack of knowledge concerning reproduction (3.5). Two lady ornithologists out for a walk observe a rare bird flying through the sky: a stork carrying a new baby to its destination. The caption reads: "Our bird-watching society will never believe us!" This amusing vignette might suggest that in at least some respects Henry knew more than he let on; and the simple image of a new baby being "delivered" ties in with his longing to adopt a child.

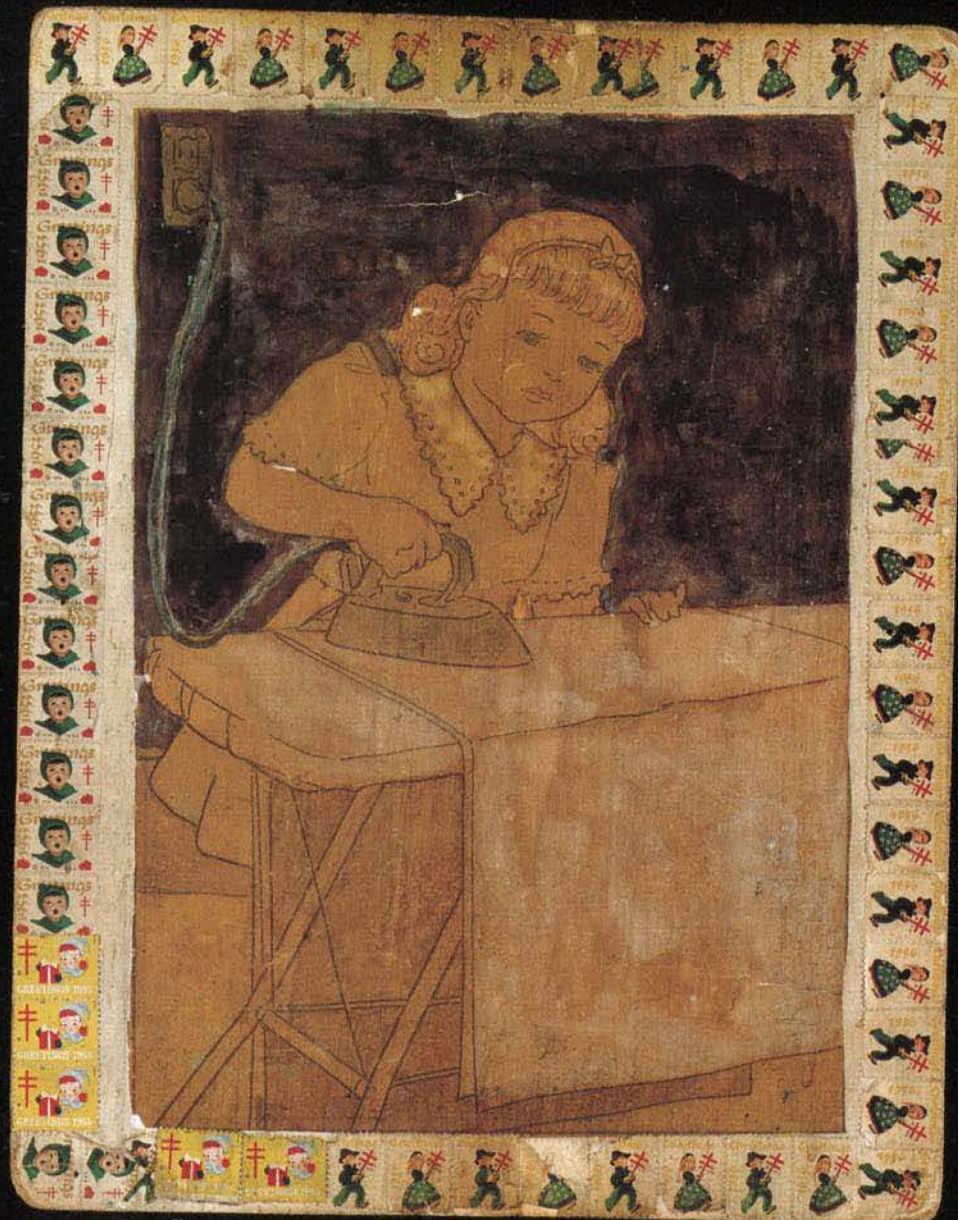
THE VAST MAJORITY of loose clippings found in Henry's room, thousands of them, depict children, mostly little girls. These include newspaper and magazine photographs and illustrations, fashion illustrations depicting children's clothing, drawings of little girls from comics, and enormous numbers of children depicted in the simplified drawing style of coloring books. No picture of a little girl escaped Henry's eye. It would seem that, for years and years, he preserved every single image of a young girl he came upon. Henry's idea of beauty, and the central aesthetic preoccupation of his life, was the image of a little girl. Obviously his obsession with these children goes far beyond aesthetics. On one level, the images of children which adorned his walls were only stand-ins for the real little girl he wanted so badly to possess.

In the 1950s, Darger made a series of "framed pictures" for his room. These consist of one or more borrowed images, most often of little girls, with a surrounding border of Easter seals, which also include images of small children.¹⁴ We would probably be mistaken in assuming that for Henry these carefully "framed" images were simply decorations for his room, or homemade works of

art. They may have come closer to being icons, and objects of reverence. One of the most beautiful of these collages is *Little Girl Ironing*, a single page from a coloring book, carefully painted by Henry in a tonal range that is oddly evocative of gold (3.7). In that some of these framed pictures consist of two or more images assembled on a background of heavy cardboard, we are probably not wrong in seeing them as simple examples of Darger's involvement with collage.

Some of the pictures which once decorated the walls are much older; faded and darkened photographs extending back to the days of Henry's childhood, or even beyond. These sentimental old photographs of little girls betray an intensity surpassing that of the more casual contemporary images. Certainly they possessed a unique hold on his imagination, since it was with these images that a profoundly irrational process began to occur; the reidentification of the subject of the photograph in accord with his "other reality." For example, an image of a charming young lady, who is identified on the print as "Hedda," is reidentified by Henry as "Mary Evangelinia Gloriana" (3.6). The process of subverting outside reality for his own purposes had begun.

Another far more unsettling procedure, innocent and yet strangely compulsive and irrational, is the subtle modification of photographs by penciling over the eyes in various ways. Usually this involved the addition of lead pencil markings to the whites of the eyes, or in the pupils and irises, so that in the half-light of his room they would appear to glow and sparkle, in a manner that is unnervingly lifelike.¹⁵ A whole series of these modified photographs, brought to life by dubious means, once



adorned the room, while many other similarly modified images are to be found in his clipping collections. It would seem that eyes possessed particular importance to Henry, and that he almost invariably felt compelled to add to images of the face in this way.¹⁶

AS WE STARE at these haunting images of time past, we are inevitably reminded of the little girl whose image wasn't in the room, the lost picture of Annie Aronburg. The significance of the missing picture lay precisely in the fact that it was missing. Despite the thousands of pictures which he possessed, it was the missing picture, and the missing little girl, by whom he was truly obsessed.¹⁷ He felt a deep attraction to all lost children. Numerous clippings in the room commemorate their disappearance and their ordeal, or celebrate their courage and their safe return to their families. Other newspaper clippings contain stories that didn't end happily; pictures and accounts of the kidnapping and murder of children also haunt the room.¹⁸ Behind these often inconsequential accounts and photographs of lost children lurk profound feelings of sadness, desire, and also rage. We must remember that Henry too was abandoned. In his room he became the champion of lost and mistreated children. His vast collections represent a lifelong rescue operation: every image of a little girl he found, found a home with him.

3.7

Henry Darger
 Untitled [Modified picture of little girl ironing framed by Christmas Seals].
 Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.

Found illustration, unmodified advertisement for Coppertone. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.



Found illustration,
*The Saturday Evening
Post*, unmodified.



Found newspaper photograph, five naked little girls in a bathtub.



Because of the strict censorship governing the reproduction of material seen as sexual, even the most explicit photographs of naked children which Darger cut from popular sources did nothing to clarify his sexual confusion (3.10). His internal conception of anatomy was in any case far stronger than the evidence of his senses. His personal vision was so overwhelmingly powerful and persistent that even photographic truth had to yield to his pictorial imagination. And so began the extensive altering of images in accord with his internal vision of the Realms of the Unreal, which represents the beginning of Darger's activity as a painter. It was not reality which was to correct Darger, but Darger as artist who was to correct reality.

Altered Images

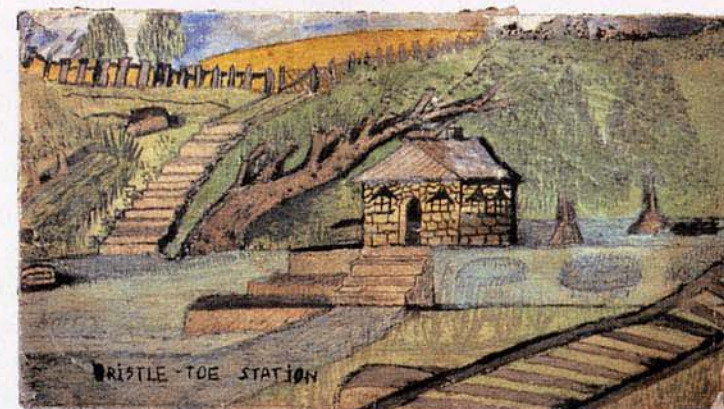
Henry was capable of painting a simple picture. A carefully finished watercolor entitled *Bristle-Toe-Station* demonstrates his rather limited ability¹⁹ (3.11). The subject illustrated is a scene from *The Realms*, volume four, chapter 15, entitled "The Battle and Capture of Bristle-Toe-Station." A tiny stone train station is set in a hilly landscape. Elaborately textured trees surround the small building, while steps lead up the hill into the distance. Oddly twisted and foreshortened train tracks cut diagonally across the foreground. The painting displays Henry's artistic naiveté, both in its exaggerated concern with texture and detail, and in the complex but unconvincing construction of space. Most striking, given the subject, is the total absence of human figures. Even at this early stage, Henry was convinced of his inability to draw figures. It was undoubtedly this conviction which for so many years prevented him from making any attempt to illustrate *The Realms*. It was a problem that had to find a solution, before his passionate involvement with picture making could begin.

The solution came, not all at once, but in stages each of which involved new awarenesses and inventions. The motivation compelling Darger to innovate was an increasingly powerful need to illustrate *In The Realms of the Unreal*. In that work Darger sees himself as a newspaperman filing reports from the field. His initial impulse seems to have been to provide snapshots, objective portraits of the major personalities involved, with detailed captions below, as in a newspaper. Darger's contribution was initially very slight, the writing of the captions, and the coloring of the photographs. In their extreme tentativeness, his awkward

attempts at adding color to found images reveal an awareness of the then common practice of hand-tinting black-and-white photographs. The little children in the photograph are unchanged, and only the caption below reveals their completely new existence.

These little children near came being victims of the Glandelinians, but were rescued at Sanderspery. The Vivian girls were their rescuers. The poor little girl with the golden hair lost her speech for a long time, the result of being strangled by a strong Glandelinian soldier, who Violet killed with a well aimed shot. (3.12)

Darger was soon finding characters from *The Realms* everywhere he looked. Military men from one war only needed colorful new uniforms in order to be reidentified and reengaged elsewhere. A newspaper photograph in black and white, of a well-decorated individual, was repainted in a bright red, yellow, and blue uniform, along with a shocking-pink beard, to resemble General Greatheart (3.13). The likeness was unmistakable.



3.11 above
Henry Darger
Bristle-Toe-Station.
Watercolor on board.
19 x 10 5/8 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



3.12 right
Henry Darger
Untitled [Three little
girls and a boy].
Photograph glued to
cardboard, colored
and with caption by
Darger. 9 x 7 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.13 left
Henry Darger
General Greatheart.
Modified newspaper
photograph with
color and additions
by Darger. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



THESE LITTLE CHILDREN NEARLY CAME BEING VICTIMS OF THE
 GANDELINIANS BUT WERE RESCUED AT SANDERS BERY
 THE VIVIAN GIRLS WERE THEIR RESCUERS THE LITTLE
 GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN HAIR LOST HER SPEECH FOR A LONG
 TIME THE RESULT OF BEING STRANGLED BY A STRONG GAND
 ELINIAN SOLDIER, WHO VIOLET VIVIAN KILLED BY A WELL
 AIMED SHOT

3.14
Henry Darger
 Untitled [Unidentified
 general]. Paper cut-
 out mounted on
 heavy cardboard.
 ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

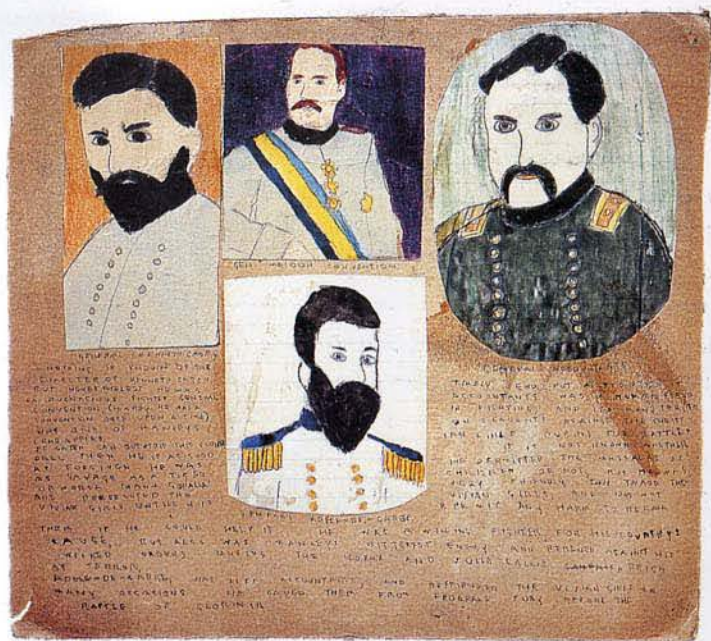


A large portrait sketch in charcoal, probably by another artist and presumably found in the garbage, involves an additional step of great importance²⁰ (3.14). Richly overpainted in heavy tempera, and outfitted in a splendid vermilion uniform with gold epaulets and decorations, the original drawing was totally transformed into a true Darger. The tall red crown bears the golden insignia of a Christian general: crossed flags and the cross. Henry's rapidly developing color sense is demonstrated by his choice of dark green for the figure's eyebrows and beard. Mere naturalism was already being abandoned. The final step involved the removal of the original background, by cutting around the contour of the image, so that the general could step out of the picture and into Henry's room.

The majority of these modified pictures of figures from Darger's history were intended not as illustrations for his book, but as part of the decor of his room. By surrounding himself with characters from *The Realms*, Darger could all but disappear into his other world. His room was slowly being transformed into that "unreality" in which he felt at home. The cut-outs, freed of all previous associations, could be adapted to all kinds of situations and purposes. For example, an almost too pretty depiction of the boy colonel Jack Evans, transformed into a cut-out, was introduced into a page of text, surrounded by a lengthy description of his heroic deeds and adventures on behalf of the Vivian girls whose guardian he was (see illustration 2.7).

3.15
Henry Darger
*General Kenneth
 Casey, General Meldon
 Convention, General
 Adele-de-Garbe, and
 General Accountants.*
 12 1/2 x 14 in. ©1998
 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.16
Henry Darger
*General Johnnie
 Johnston, General
 Phycian, and General
 Donald Aurandoco.*
 Dated to 1918. ©1998
 Kiyoko Lerner.



The Painted Portraits of Generals

For a considerable period of time, Darger seems to have taken on the task of painting small portraits of all the leading generals who fought in the Glandco-Angelinian wars — both the good and evil participants. Usually several of these small pictures are mounted on a single piece of cardboard, like pages in a family album, with the name of the general printed below. Frequently they appear on both sides of the heavy cardboard, which raises the possibility that initially they may not have been intended for the walls of his room. Occasionally lengthy texts are hand-printed below the figures, and these provide detailed explanations concerning their achievements in the wars (3.15).

The fairly consistent size and format of these portraits, as well as the extreme age of the cardboard they are mounted on, suggest that this body of work was produced more or less at one time. Over seventy individual portraits survive.²¹ In a sense the painted portraits of generals represent the commencement of Darger's own work, as well as the beginning of his involvement with an extremely important technique. In creating these portraits he abandoned the use of overpainted photographs, relying instead on various methods of transferring them onto blank paper. The resulting drawing preserves the basic contours of the original image, as well as the pose and some of the character of the underlying photograph. The simple line drawing, which is often in the purple ink of old carbon paper, is then filled in with color. Darger seems to have felt more independent of his model, free to invent his own uniforms and decorations, as well as hair, beards, and mustaches,

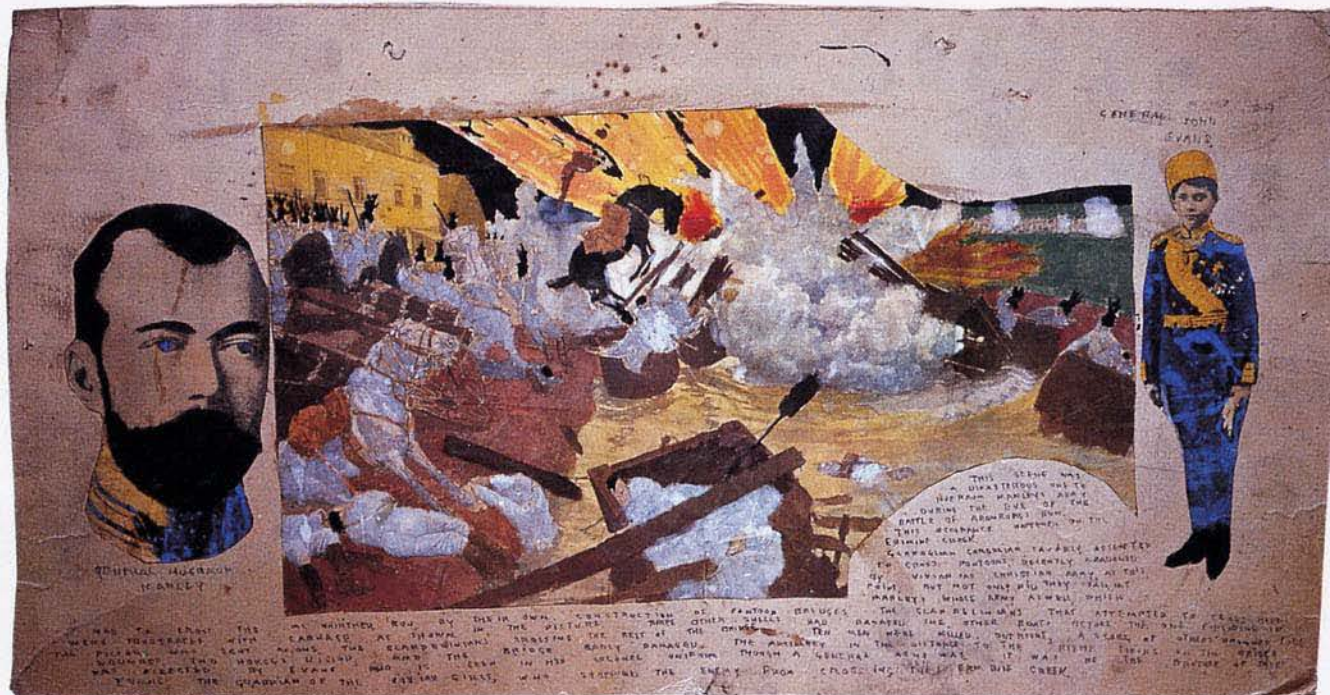
with which he adorns the underlying faces. Working in dense black ink and watercolor, he filled in the simplified shapes and the flat backgrounds. Given his love of coloring books, it is evident that he had found a way to make his own coloring book of *The Realms*, which he then completed by filling in the blanks.

Almost invariably, one can detect a more "sophisticated" prototype behind the drawing, and traces of distinct personalities. But the uniqueness of these naive portraits lies in Henry's wonderfully awkward and simplified copies. It was through the supposedly mechanical act of tracing that an insignificant photograph could be transformed into an original Darger drawing, and fitted perfectly into the naive narrative style of *The Realms*. The drawings evoke something of the mood and character types which we associate with the American Civil War. The names Henry invented for his characters, and particularly his generals, also seem to recall the heroes of that war, who he could only have known as dark photographs or engravings in military histories.²² Boldly painted in intense colors, these images hold their own, even when looked at from across a room. Up close they lose something of their personality and power. These drawings, one of which is dated 1918 on the back (3.16), represent the very beginning of what was to be a vast project, the illustration of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. They reflect Darger's nascent skills at an early stage. He was twenty-six years old, and nowhere near being the sophisticated artist he would become.

DARGER WAS, however, essentially a narrative artist, not a portrait painter. His genius lay in capturing the broad sweep of events, and in documenting a war fought on many fronts at once; cities destroyed, fire, floods, and vast natural cataclysms. His written descriptions are richly pictorial, he writes what he sees. Free of limitations he would have preferred a vast canvas, inundated with detail. As his confidence in his abilities grew, his ambitions grew as well. Content at first to portray individual heroes, he soon sought to portray historical events, groups of generals, and scenes of battle.

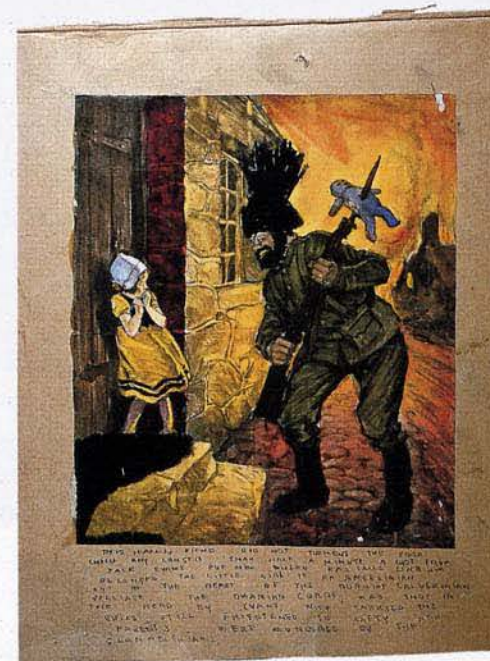
Historical Paintings

For such complex scenes, Darger was even more dependent on borrowed images which he could alter in accord with his particular needs, his version of history. However, the borrowed images which were available, depictions of military meetings, scenes of battle from newspapers and illustrated magazines, and photographs of cities in ruins, were small. Henry's wish to transform these more complex images foundered on his lack of painting ability. Heavily overpainted in primary colors, the detailed photographs and drawings were all but lost beneath the bright patches of brilliant color (3.17). Even when using the largest and simplest images he could find, his battle scenes are all but unreadable. Only his beloved fires and great explosions of flame can be made out with clarity. The closer he got to depicting complex scenes from *The Realms*, the more his inability to handle paint betrayed him, obscuring the subject and destroying the image he had hoped to borrow. The explanations below the



3.17 above
Henry Darger
Eve of the Battle of Ermine Creek on Aronburg's Run [as well as two portraits of Generals, General John Evans and General Huebner Manley]. Watercolor. 14 1/2 x 8 1/4 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.18 right
Henry Darger
An Inhuman Fiend Tormenting a Poor Child. Dated August 13, 1918; by a delivery slip attached to the reverse of the card-board used by Darger. Modified illustration. 8 1/2 x 11 3/4 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



pictures grew longer as he attempted to describe in words the narrative which could not be seen in the picture.

Nevertheless, his love of scenes of battle led him to cut out any such illustrations he could find, adapting them later to his own purposes. Illustrations and photographs depicting the Civil War, as well as more recent photographs illustrating the mechanized terrors of the First World War, were readily available. His imagination carried him right into the carnage. In a wonderful overpainted found drawing, which he described as depicting the Glandelinian defeat at Jennie Turner, he attempted to portray "a regular conglomerat of confusion" (3.19). He succeeded admirably, to the point that the picture all but disappears. Struggling troops, wildly rearing horses, wheeled vehicles, and clouds of smoke are all washed with dark tones of gray, drab green, brown, and black, so close in value as to be indistinguishable. In the yellow sky above, filled with shrapnel, Henry has drawn dense black clouds of roiling smoke, and flashes of intense red fire, which in their vehemence and naiveté contrast with the professional but obscured battle illustration below.

Cities ruined and abandoned as a result of war or natural disaster inspired Darger to produce unusually expressive pictures, which owe less to a model. The colored drawing *Sunset at Glorinia* is one of his finest portrayals of the effects of battle on architecture and on nature (3.20). While there is no evidence of tracing, the picture, in its compositional sophistication, is likely to be a copy, extensively modified and colored by Darger. Silhouetted against a glowing sky, the lower half of which is a sea of orange-yellow flame, the

remains of a once proud mansion appear like the splintered hull of a sunken ship, its masts and planks projecting at all angles. Tangled grasses, broken walls, ladders leading nowhere, and the complete absence of people, effectively convey the desolation of war. There is a terrible intensity implied in Darger's heavily scrubbed surfaces. Polished blacks gleaming against the paper, darkly worked masses of crayon, paint applied on top of this, and above it all the forceful hatching of crayon and pencil, convincingly embody his excitement. The text below provides evidence of how found images could inspire his writing.

Ruins of Aronburg's Mansion, Glorinia, where three of the Vivian Girls, Catherine, Hettie, Daisy, were taken. This immense structure having been a block long and five stories high. It fairly caved in at the sudden concussion of the cannonading on the MicHollister Stanck, White Rose, and Carnation Ridges, during the Battle of Glorinia. Over six hundred people were killed in this building, the mansion caving in so quickly that none of its tenants escaped. Only the remaining walls, seen in the picture, held firm. This building stood on the corners of Alicie and Mic Hollister Street in the city of Glorinia.

Darger's early attempts at "painting," more correctly at overpainting borrowed or traced pictures, occasionally yielded memorable images. A borrowed image might capture his attention because of its almost perfect accord with his own internal imagery. His additions could, on occasion, immeasurably enhance an insignificant original, lending color and feeling to an otherwise banal illustration. An example is the small picture *An Inhuman Fiend*

Tormenting a Poor Child (3.18). Originally a black-and-white newspaper illustration, the image awakened feelings of passionate intensity in Darger. A huge and ugly Omarian Curde has cornered a frightened little girl in a doorway. Having pierced her doll with a bayonet, he now turns to the defenseless child. The addition of color provided Darger with a means of giving expression to his feelings. The drab gray uniform of the Omarian is silhouetted against a burning Calverinian village, the sky filled with fire, the street awash in blood. A curious tide of crimson flows down the door frame behind the girl, and an inexplicable black shadow caresses her feet. The luminous yellows and reds, the use of a dark but transparent silhouette, the blue of the doll against the flaming orange sky, completely transform the original illustration, providing a first glimpse of the brilliant colorist Darger was to become.

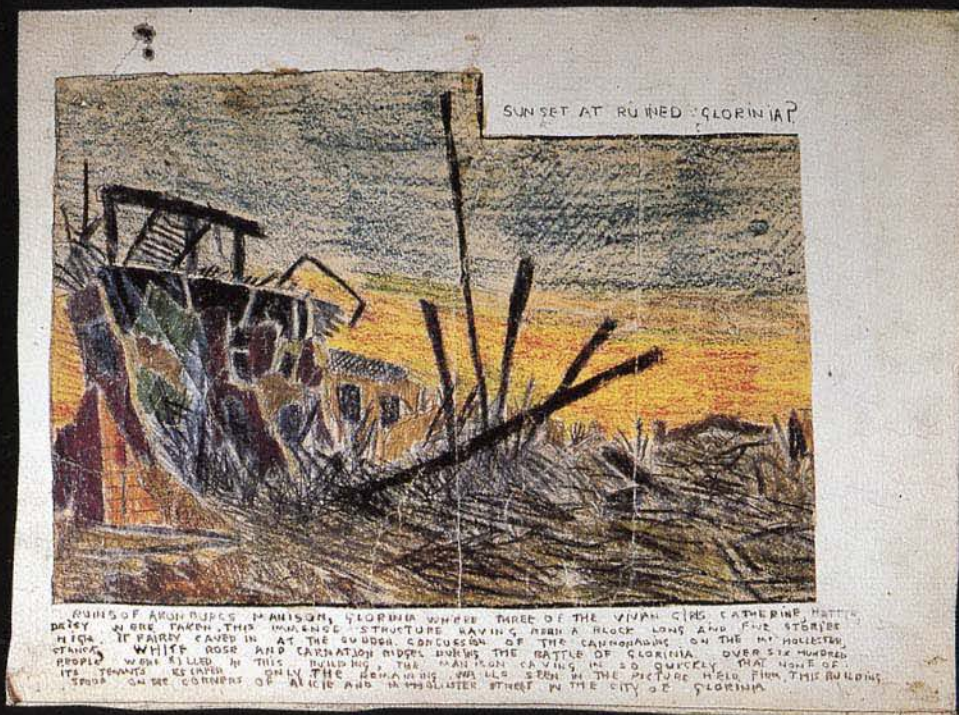
This painting also provides a clue to the dating of this series of portraits and altered images. Like all of these images it is attached to a sheet of dark and decaying cardboard. On the reverse is a delivery slip for Marshall Fields and Co., Chicago. The slip is dated August 13, 1918.²³ Nothing about the borrowed images is in conflict with such an early date. But the date itself, far earlier than we would have imagined possible, places these early experiments at illustration precisely in the period when *In the Realms of the Unreal* was still being written. The earliest illustrations of the work are therefore contemporary with the writing of the manuscript.²⁴ As a young man of twenty-six, Darger had already embarked on his double career as writer and illustrator of *The Realms*.



3.19

Henry Darger

Glandelinian Defeat at Jennie Turner. Black and white illustration mounted on card-board, colored and with additions by Darger, two holes at the top for hanging. 13 x 18 1/2 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.20

Henry Darger

Sunset at Glorinia.

Illegible date on back. Colored drawing combining pencil, crayon, watercolor, on cardboard. 15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.21 above
Henry Darger
 Untitled [Bulletin board collage with clipping of Joe Namath]. Various paper clippings on cardboard. 20 x 14 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.22 left
Henry Darger
Straight Arrow. Dated by Christmas Seals to 1959. Framed picture of two identical newspaper illustrations on corrugated cardboard. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Experiments with Collage

Darger's early methods of picture-making seem to derive for the most part from his childhood. His love of coloring books and of coloring, his preoccupation with cutting out and pasting, and with the making of scrapbooks, may reflect an early involvement with images, and with art activities of various kinds.²⁵ Quite possibly, his pleasure in tracing and coloring Civil War portraits began in school.

Less certain is the origin of his use of what we have come to know as "collage." Darger went to school long before the sophisticated use of collage in twentieth-century art began. It is unlikely that collage techniques of any kind would have been in use in Chicago schools at that time. At home, he might have been introduced to techniques of *découpage*, which involve the arranging and varnishing of decorative collage fragments. This much older, and largely European, technique of ornamentation could have been familiar to his own German family, or to the Anschutz family with whom he lived at the time of his most extensive use of varnished collage.

However, Darger's experiments with collage were far from traditional. His room, for example, was decorated with numerous small collage-assemblages of an unusually disorganized kind (3.21). Cut-out photographs and illustrations, mostly of children's faces, are superimposed in almost random fashion on a heavy sheet of cardboard, in such a way that the faces are preserved, but the rest of the image is largely papered over. Henry has also modified the eyes with pencil in most cases. These "bulletin-board collages" were done over several decades, and individually may have been added to over considerable periods of time. The accidental and cumulative effect is very different from most of Darger's other work in collage.

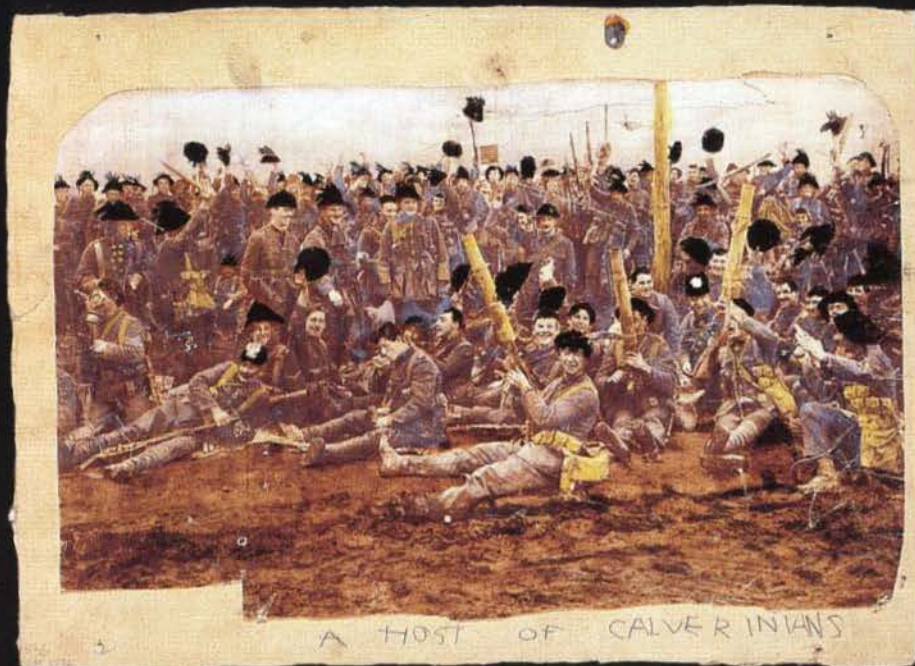
His "framed pictures," for example, in that they often involve several cut-out images brought together on a single piece of cardboard in a carefully considered fashion, can be seen as conforming more closely to conventional ideas of collage. This is especially apparent in the "framed picture" entitled *Straight Arrow*, in which Darger assembled two identical cut-outs of an Indian in war paint, within a surrounding border of Christmas seals (3.22). However, none of these collages involves an illusionistic merging of image fragments within a single scene. Nor do they relate in any obvious way to *The Realms*.

Illusionistic Collage

A group of collages, executed in a radically different style, were almost certainly intended as illustrations of *In The Realms of the Unreal*. They represent a determined effort to capture the drama and complexity of battle, and the immense confusion and destruction which accompany the occupation of vast cities by invading troops. For the first time, Darger found a method which would enable him to approach, pictorially, something of the scope and obsessive elaboration typical of his writing style, an additive technique which we will call "illusionistic collage."

This collage technique may well have been Henry's own invention.²⁶ He was driven to use it by his wish to make much larger pictures, embracing the full richness and complexity of war. These were, indeed, his largest works thus far (they generally measure from 12 to 15 inches high, and over 22 inches long). An important example is the modified sepia photograph reidentified as *A Host of Calverinians* (3.23). The idea for the technique may have come from artificially staged war photographs, in which large groups of soldiers are "arranged" so that they can all be seen clearly. Darger had used such photographs in making modified images illustrative of his own war. Careful study of the carefully composed and demarcated figure groupings may have suggested the idea of cutting out and assembling individual groups of figures on a large sheet of paper. In this way, a series of war photographs or illustrations could be cut up and reassembled as one single, but vast, scene, a large illusionistic collage.

An early example of the technique is seen in the smallest collage of the group, which represents a military camp on the outskirts of a little village (3.24). The source of the material for this collage was a group of black line engravings of military scouts and covered wagons. Darger joined a number of pages to make a suitable background. He then cut out groups of figures, one of which included horses and a large covered wagon, assembling them across the foreground. Smaller figures were introduced slightly further back. The new technique involved cutting around the contours of each figure, or group, so that it could function independently in the scene. Darger evidently understood that size diminishes with distance, and he observed this law, selecting figures of suitable scale for placement at various depths within the scene. Far more surprising is his subtle construction of background detail and depth. Fragmentary pieces, consisting of minuscule groupings of tiny tents and clusters of trees, are collaged effectively into the far-distant background, so as to create a perfect illusion of distant hills covered with tents. Step by step he has built up a complex and convincing image of a busy encampment.



3.23
Henry Darger
A Host of Calverinians.
 Sepia photograph
 with color added by
 Darger. 15 3/4 x 11 3/8 in.
 Collection de l'Art
 Brut, Lausanne.
 CAB 11532 (verso).
 ©1998 Kiyoko
 Lerner. Photograph
 by Claude Bornand.



3.24
Henry Darger
 Untitled [Civil War
 engravings painted
 over by Darger].
 Illusionistic Collage,
 unvarnished. 17 3/4 x
 11 1/2 in. Collection de
 l'Art Brut, Lausanne.
 CAB 11547. ©1998
 Kiyoko Lerner.
 Photograph by Claude
 Bornand.

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He then used watercolors to introduce color to his new picture: a dark-blue sky, pale browns, greens, and yellows for the distant landscape, and rich reds, browns, and yellows for the foreground figures, wagons, and tents. The uniforms are all touched up with a brilliant crimson, and the hats redrawn, to transform a group of westward-bound settlers and troops into an unidentified military force. The color effectively pulls the scene together, obscuring the numerous joins.

Only one detail stands out as strangely irrational. At the center of the composition a large rectangle of sky, with a tree silhouetted against it, is left unpainted: a large block of white in the middle of a fully colored composition. A small American flag is flying in the corner of this white rectangle. What Darger seems to have intended, and from a distance it works perfectly, was to use the unpainted rectangle to suggest a very large white flag flying at the center of his composition, with the American flag repainted, as a tiny insignia in its upper left corner.

The remainder of the illusionistic collages are larger, and make use of printed photographs or photographic illustrations, to construct still more elaborate illusions of the reality of war (3.25). Darger was able to make use of superb sepia photographs (probably from Sunday supplements) to obtain the fragmentary groups of soldiers he required. He used the diminishing size of figures in the various fragments to construct an astonishingly convincing spatial recession, with troops dressed in blue, with red helmets, scattered effectively over the vast battlefield. Still more impressive is his use of brown painted areas of earth and rock to suggest the uneven terrain of the battle-

field, receding to distant plains and far-off mountains. It is impossible at a glance (or in reproduction) to realize how many separate fragments are involved, and how effectively he has used them to move, step by step, level by level, backwards into space. In the far distance, tiny individual soldiers are silhouetted against drifting clouds of white smoke. At the top of the picture strips of blue painted paper have been glued on to suggest a deep blue sky above the dark battlefield. A small section near the upper left corner has been torn away. This small damaged area reveals how quickly Darger's carefully constructed illusion can be destroyed.

The majority of the blue-coated soldiers were cut out and added separately, either in small groups, or individually. While he understood how to use the relative sizes of his figures to construct convincing depth, he also broke with this convention when it suited him. An example is seen in the four figures stretched out on the ground at the center of the composition. These large figures contrast startlingly with the tiny troops below them. They seem to be in danger of being shot by the group in the trench at lower right. It is these curiously irrational shifts in scale and spatial position that add life to this assemblage of images, disturbing the illusion just sufficiently to make us aware that we are not looking at a naturalistic photograph, but at an artificially composed and slightly naive vision of war.

3.25

Henry Darger

Untitled [Battle scene].

Illusionistic Collage.

22 1/2 x 14 3/4 in.

Collection de l'Art

Brut, Lausanne.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Photograph by

Claude Bornand.





3.26

Henry Darger

Untitled [City with occupying troops]. Illusionistic Collage, varnished, and detail of detached fragment, since re-glued in place. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

In his writings, Darger's descriptions of battle and of occupied cities are so long, elaborate, and intricately detailed that it is often impossible to visualize the whole. One becomes utterly lost in detail. While this is also true of the collages, which are not at all easy to read, the overview that is permitted by a single complex image does suggest something of the scope and grandeur of Henry's vision. This is especially true of his collage portrayals of occupied cities. Nowhere in his writing does he convey an impression of architectural majesty such as is to be seen in his collage of a great waterfront cityscape, filled with masses of joyous troops (3.26). The picture is absolutely convincing in its suggestion of a sequence of monumental buildings bordering a vast avenue which runs off into the distance. Examination of the individual fragments reveals that these buildings originally had nothing to do with one another, having been artificially assembled along a street and a waterfront where they do not belong.²⁷ Masses of blue uniformed troops have been carefully added to conceal the transition.

An individual fragment that has come loose enables us to see how this process of cutting and pasting was done (3.26). In this case, a large group of soldiers with guns was carefully cut out as a group, and introduced into the city. The entire build-up of troops was achieved in this way, with cut-outs of small groups superimposed, to suggest a vast congregation of men where there was none previously. Through the use of collage, Darger was able to "occupy" an entirely non-existent city. Color was then added over the sepia base to unify the whole surface, and to identify the occupying force as members of an army from the Realms of the Unreal.

What was the function of the illusionistic collages? The majority of them are executed on both sides of a sheet of paper. Henry then used additional paper to create a mat, which surrounds the image on both sides of the leaf. Unfortunately, he also invented a technique for enhancing the color and holding the collage fragments in place. This involved the application of what is probably varnish to the whole surface of the collage.²⁸ This has led in time to a darkening of the surface, as well as to making the paper on which the collage is mounted extremely brittle. As a result, the pictures were far too flexible and delicate to be hung on the wall. It would seem probable that these double-sided collages were intended to be bound together as a book, a first attempt at illustrating *The Realms*. Twenty-five individual collages on thirteen sheets still exist. Some are probably unfinished, in that they lack color and varnish.

Strangely, none of the collages bear inscriptions which identify the subject of the scene Henry was illustrating. As a result, it is impossible to determine which battles or cities from *In the Realms of the Unreal* each collage is intended to depict. The hand-colored uniforms, however, make it quite certain that the illusionistic collages were intended as illustrations of *The Realms*.²⁹

The collage, known from a sign which appears in it as *Nicht Argern, nur wundern*, is a truly wonderful construction (3.27). Composed of an enormous number of small sepia fragments, it embodies the chaos and utter devastation of war. At upper left a city is in a state of ruin — two collage fragments have been juxtaposed here, joined by a ruined bridge which Henry cut out with extraordinary care. He has also introduced burned and blackened trees which he made himself. On the right side of the composition is a destroyed and desolate landscape, assembled from all sorts of fragments to suggest an expanse of burned and twisted wreckage, in which nothing is left standing. Silhouetted against this barren scene, he has constructed another, still larger, ruined tree. The foreground consists of a series of fragments which introduce purple-coated Christian troops into this ruined world. Huge horses are struggling to extricate themselves from a sea of mud. The pieces fitted together in this work are unusually numerous, and are carefully distributed and oriented, so as to suggest frantic activity. Henry's picture of devastation is extremely convincing. His imagination has carried him into the very heart of war. Surely that is the function of these collages, to allow Darger to participate vicariously in the war from which he had been expelled. Images of the First World War provided fodder for his other war, as he transformed outer reality in conformity with the Realms of the Unreal in which he lived. Both in his writings, and in these illusionistic collages which so effectively capture the horror of war, he found a means of participating to an obsessional degree in battle. Prevented from playing a part in either of the two Great Wars, he participated instead in his own.³⁰



The Battle of Calverhine

3.27 left

Henry Darger

Nicht argern nur wundern. Illusionistic Collage. 22 1/2 x 15 in. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, CAB 11542. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand.

3.28 overleaf

Henry Darger

The Battle of Calverhine. 116 5/8 x 37 7/16 in. Varnished collage. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph courtesy of Michael Baruch.

3.29 page 142

Henry Darger

The Battle of Calverhine. Detail. Varnished Collage. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph courtesy of Michael Baruch.

3.30 page 143

Henry Darger

The Battle of Calverhine. Detail. Varnished Collage. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph courtesy of Michael Baruch.

The masterpiece of Darger's work in collage is the vast ruined picture *The Battle of Calverhine*. Almost 10 feet long, and over 3 feet high, it is also one of his largest compositions, and certainly his largest collage³¹ (3.28). It hung, from 1932 until after his death, on the north wall of his room. Sadly, time has dealt harshly with this ambitious work whose slow self-destruction is inevitable. Looking like a mass of deeply pitted and wrinkled tar, the battle scene is warped and buckled, cracked and sagging in its frame. Heavy varnish applied to the many layers of cardboard and paper fragments has darkened it to such a degree that even from a short distance the individual forms are obscured and the subject matter all but indecipherable. Only the title, inscribed by Darger on a small label at the top (left) is still visible.³²

Despite its ruined condition, and the unusual difficulties involved in studying or photographing it, it is essential that we explore this collage in some detail because of the light it throws on Henry's emerging artistic conceptions, and on the function of images and image-making in his life. The title enables us to be quite certain that the picture was intended to illustrate one section of his book. Because of its enormous size and complexity, it marked a turning point in Darger's development as illustrator of *The Realms*.

On the basis of the image fragments preserved in the collage, it would be possible to arrive at an approximate date for the execution of the work. However, more definite evidence for dating it exists. At the time of its completion, when Darger varnished the picture, he also varnished the

reverse side. He then lay sheets of newspaper in the wet varnish as part of the thick supportive backing he was creating. Those newspaper pages all derive from a single copy of the *Chicago Daily News*, for Wednesday, August 28, 1929.³³ It seems certain, given its style and technique, that it formed part of the series of "illusionistic collages" which we have been examining. Possibly it represents the culmination of that series, all of which should probably be dated to the second half of the 1920s.³⁴

In its reliance on small-scale black line engravings of American military history, it can be closely related to the smallest collage in that series (see illustration 3.24), a work which might almost be seen as a preliminary study for the huge collage. Free of varnish, the small picture provides an accurate idea, on a much reduced scale, of the effect Darger may have hoped to achieve in the larger work. Perhaps it was the availability of a very large number of historical engravings that he could cut up which encouraged him to embark on the creation of what was to be an enormous historical mural. However, in moving from a small field of activity to the huge expanse of *The Battle of Calverhine*, he was to encounter very different problems.

Work on the complex composition must have continued over a considerable period of time, certainly a year or more. Darger was still living at 1035 Webster Avenue. He obviously valued the collage, because when he moved to 851 Webster, in 1932, he brought the heavy picture with him to his new room. It was to form a dominant part of the otherworldly environment of images which he was to create around himself there.

The picture continues the tradition of the "illusionistic collages" in attempting to construct a broad, deep, and coherent landscape. In depicting this vast battlefield, remote from any urban center, Darger allows us to see how war converts a beautiful portion of the natural world into hell.

The composition is divided into four horizontal sections. At the bottom is a carefully constructed foreground area with large-scale figure groupings. Many of these figures are cut off by the frame. Behind this "row" of figures, there is a sudden and very dramatic change in size, as Darger began to employ very small figures, and more active signs of battle. This section of small engraved and painted figure groupings continues to about halfway up the composition, where extraordinarily tiny armies move through the dark landscape.

The third section, or background, is a curiously abstract world of drifting smoke and clouds occasionally illuminated by bursts of fire and light from exploding bombs and artillery shells. Few figures are to be found in this section, which in its amorphous forms represents an almost Turner-like depiction of inhuman destructive forces unleashed on nature.

The uppermost area of the composition would be the sky, but because of the obscurity of the section below, it is impossible to observe the transition from earth to the heavens. In this section, dominated by looming black clouds lit by an eerie orange glow, he seems to draw nature into the carnage, as forest fires ravage Calverinia. Darkness has descended upon the world. In the night sky he has inserted small cut-out details, groups of planets, a galaxy, a tiny sun all but extinguished, and near the





center a huge radiating explosion. Large bare trees, some of them constructed by Darger himself, are used to tie the horizontal layers together. Smaller cut-outs depict areas of forest and of dark green foliage, but everywhere natural forms are darkened and destroyed.

In none of the other collages has he so effectively achieved such a complete unity between man and nature. This is not simply a battle occurring in nature, but the natural world transformed by war: blasted, burned, and rendered formless and chaotic. Forces unleashed by man are now no longer in his control. Darger has succeeded in embodying in purely visual terms the tragedy described in endless detail in *The Realms*.

As in the written narrative, there is a tendency for the overall scene to become mired in detail. He has employed many more small cut-out fragments per square foot than in any other of his collages. The theme of battle is announced at bottom center, where a group of three redcoats are firing a large piece of artillery. This fragment from a mezzotint engraving is silhouetted against a number of lighter pieces of paper put together by Henry to suggest a cloud of white smoke. The gun has just been fired, and a fourth figure in red, rather large in scale compared to the others, recoils from the explosion. A flagpole emerges from the group, and attached to it is an enormous flag, its stripes colored by Darger so as to transform it into the flag of one of the Christian nations, perhaps Calvernia³⁵ (3.30).

To right and left of this dramatic scene are long sections filled with dead and dying men, occasionally interspersed with rearing black horses. In these segments actual photographs and painted illustrations replace the less powerful engravings. On the naked torso of one of the fallen men, Henry has carefully painted spots of blood. A larger than life-size figure, dressed in a red uniform with blue stripes, looms above the soldier, perhaps attending to him (3.29). Another large fallen soldier still clutches a flag. In the midst of these scenes of carnage are small but dazzling explosions. Carefully cut-out trails of smoke arch across the picture, as explosive cannonballs descend upon the helpless warriors below.

Toward the bottom right side, Darger has employed a technique which would become very important to him in the future. Having found a second copy of the scene of the three men firing a large gun, he introduces it into his picture for a second time, only varying the color. Elsewhere he has inserted carbon-paper tracings, hand-colored, so as to add figures from sources which he was apparently unable to cut up. Unsettling shifts of scale from figure to figure imbue this collage with a deeper sense of irrationality than one feels in the other smaller collages. He feels free, in the context of battle, to present once vertical images in all kinds of bizarre orientations, as figures fly into the air or descend to the ground.

There is an astonishing amount of overlap, three and four layers deep. One realizes that Darger was adding again and again to his composition, slowly constructing a dense and confusing tangle of forms. Some of the large fragments of clouds and smoke (at the right side) were added even after the collage had been completed and varnished.

Using a high-intensity lamp and a magnifying glass, it would be possible to see and describe still more figure groupings and events. It is sufficient, however, to examine a few of the many scenes in order to suggest the extraordinary confusion and complexity that overwhelms this collage. One examines it by wandering from point to point, very close up. There is no possibility of an overall view. No matter how long one studies the surface, it is impossible to put it together. One simply sees and remembers individual details, small sections of the vast battle. There is no unifying composition, and no way of seeing the whole. This is exactly the impression one receives from his written descriptions of battle.

It seems probable that while working on it, Darger had no awareness that, from a distance, the picture would be unreadable. As in his writings, he employed an additive principle of composition, with his obsessive preoccupation with detail obscuring the whole. Scattered almost at random all over the surface are small cut-out explosions, bomb bursts, clouds of fire and smoke. These were largely obtained from comic books. The usual result of explosions is chaos, and this was the effect Darger undoubtedly wanted. He didn't realize that even chaos must be ordered to be seen.

It is essential that in exploring this work, examining its strengths and weaknesses, we do not make the error of reading into it evidence of a creative process which is that of the professional artist or illustrator. Henry's intention in creating this enormous field of activity may have had little or nothing to do with the making of a "work of art." In his endless search in newspapers, magazines, and books for fragments, bits and pieces, which could be identified by him as belonging to another world, there is an unmistakable element of irrationality. He was obsessively preoccupied with the reinterpretation of "reality" in terms of an overwhelmingly intense inner vision. Once "recognized," these small segments of his reality could be cut out, and then introduced into a new context, his other world. The fragments, freed of background, became real, and he was able to manipulate them as characters in the alternate world he was creating. The purpose of inventing another world in which to function is precisely to gain control and the ability to manipulate reality. The enormous size of this scene enabled him to lose himself, quite literally, in the Realms of the Unreal. If this was his desire, then the criticism that the picture doesn't succeed from a distance is extraneous and irrelevant. Perhaps at a later stage, when the collage was complete and hanging on the wall, he may have recognized that it didn't work. Certainly, the large scale and the compositional clarity of his later drawings would suggest that by then he sought to make each of his large compositions function as a visual whole, even when rendering complex scenes.

As early experiments in illustrating *In the Realms of the Unreal*, the illusionistic collages are only partially successful. At some point Darger must have realized this. Although he had found an interesting way of assembling powerful visual images of warfare and destruction, ultimately the collages succeeded only to a limited extent in capturing the character and mood of *The Realms*. What seems to be lacking is the spontaneous and irrational flow of his narrative style and the ever present atmosphere of unreality: the strange shifts from terror and destruction to playful adventure, and the curious alternation between exaggerated history and trivial fact. One of Darger's main concerns in writing his book was with little children and the violence done to them by adults, but, as we have seen, no children appear in any of the illusionistic collages. Even in *The Battle of Calverhine*, where it would have been possible to integrate cut-outs of the Vivian sisters and their friends, children do not appear. Not only are children absent, but all the troops wear the same red-and-blue uniforms, and the evil Glandelinians are nowhere in evidence. It seems that in these realistic depictions of war, the antics of the brave girl and boy scouts, the adventures of Darger and the Gemini, even the sufferings of millions of child slaves, could find no place. As a result, the bizarre interaction between adults and children that makes this war between the Glandelinian and Christian forces so fascinating and so unreal is lost, and mere reality replaces the heroic adventures and mass terror of *The Realms*. In Darger's later work, the Vivian sisters and their evil foes assume their rightful place at the center of every composition.

To the beginning artist, the collage technique holds out the promise of an easily obtained illusion of reality. It offers instant verisimilitude. The carefully constructed "illusionistic collage" even appears to provide for the manipulation of "the truth," and the creation of a convincing alternate reality. Only later does it become apparent that the additive bringing together of pieces of external reality doesn't work. The collage technique introduced too much "reality," and too many extraneous elements, bringing the fantasy of *The Realms* too close to our world. While the techniques of illusionistic collage seemed to permit endless enlargement and elaboration there were, as well, size limits beyond which it couldn't go.

The more Darger sought to illustrate specific scenes from his narrative, the less successful illusionistic collage as a method of illustration would have become. Perhaps it was for this reason that he abandoned it. The arbitrary juxtaposition of fragments of mundane origin couldn't convincingly embody his unique vision. The technique involved too many compromises. The collages were at best only partial expressions of the reality of the Realms of the Unreal. Henry's vision was being reduced to the mundane, his wonderfully subjective view of another world was being lost. In time, his drive for true self-expression would force him to go beyond this initial solution, and to invent a more original and personal method of illustrating his vision of another world. But, in the meantime, his experiments with collage provided a training ground for the entire future of his art. The mature collage-drawings were born out of these wildly inventive experiments with what we know as collage.

The Vivian Girls and Further Experiments with Collage

Throughout all of Darger's life loneliness was a constant and inescapable reality. Fantasy provided his only possibility of closeness, and the only form that imagined closeness could assume was the love of little girls. His unrealistic hope of adopting a child could not be realized, and quite possibly he knew of no other mode of having children. Dream-like, incredibly idealized, and unrealistic visions of little girls dominated his existence. These powerful fantasies were carefully protected throughout his life, systematically cut off from any contact with reality. As a result, their hold on his imagination, on his longing and desire, was so great that he was never to go beyond them. His little girls never grew up, nor did he. What did evolve was the various methods which he invented for depicting them, for embodying his inner objects in pictures.

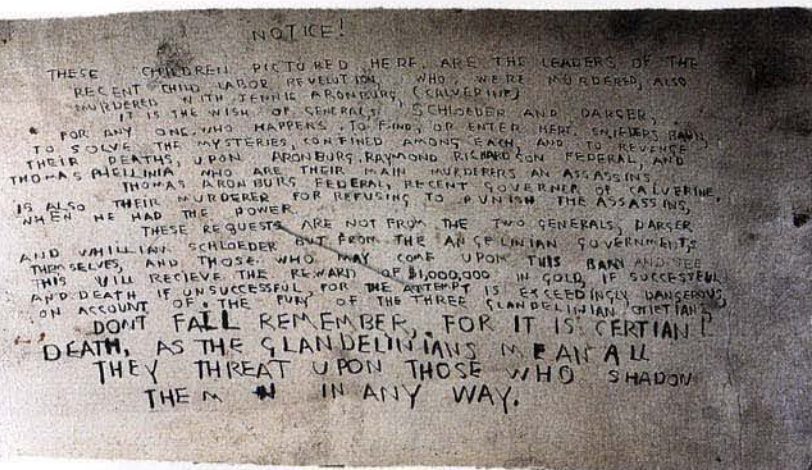
In his imagination his room was a refuge for lost children. As we have seen, found images of children were everywhere. He loved and strongly identified with the Bible passage, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven."³⁶ The Vivian sisters became, early in his life, his adopted family. From the beginning they were the dominant subjects of his writing. It was their images, their lives, their history, which he most wanted to represent. Their unearthly beauty, however, made it almost impossible for him to attempt to depict them in his art.

Nevertheless, among the very oldest images in Henry's room was a heavily varnished piece of cardboard (now broken into two and darkened with age), on which he had glued a series of very small pictures of children (3.31). The extreme antiquity of these pictures of little girls takes us back not only to Henry's childhood, but to the world of his father, and to idealized images of childhood characteristic of earlier periods in history.³⁷ Having found some black-and-white reproductions of old paintings, engravings, and photographs, he carefully overpainted them with bright, now darkened, opaque colors. Obscuring most of the detail, but retaining the faces of these romantic and sentimental portrayals of innocent childhood, he adapted them to his own needs, refashioning them as "portraits" of the seven Vivian sisters. Beneath each of the pictures is a typed label, identifying the little girl, and describing her deeds and character at some length. The description of Catherine Vivian, for example, reads as follows:

Catherine Vivian was reported killed several times, but she was not. Yet some time during the early part of the Glandco-Abbieannian War, her reported death was much disputed and found to be untrue as some else person was killed instead. Some at first said Abbieannians shot her to death by mistake, but in reality Glandelinians often tried to do it, but did not succeed. She is still very much alive.³⁸

The carefully organized display panel includes "portraits" and descriptions of all seven Vivian sisters. It belongs, I believe, to the very beginning of Henry's search for images of them, and may have originated at the time when *The Realms* was just beginning to be written.³⁹ I would like to put





3.31 left

Henry Darger

Untitled [Collage with pictures of the Vivian Sisters]. Eight altered and over-painted found images. Top half: Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. CAB 11555. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand. Bottom half: Collection of Kiyoko Lerner. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.32 above

Henry Darger

Notice! Hand-printed, 7 3/4 x 15 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.33 right

Henry Darger

Untitled [Collage with pictures of the Vivian Sisters]. Detail. Found and over-painted image of a sleeping child and her mother. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

forward the tentative suggestion that this little panel, with its collaged images, once adorned the "mimic altar" which Henry erected in March of 1912, and which survived only until August.⁴⁰ The presence of the Vivian girls on the mimic altar would indicate that Henry's conception of Roman Catholicism, its theology and its rites, had begun to undergo the curious transformation that is implied in *The Realms of the Unreal*.

A hand-printed notice makes reference to a group of pictures of murdered children which were to be seen in "Snieder's Barn" (3.32). This odd little text perfectly embodies the curious mixture of fact and fiction so characteristic of Darger's reality.

NOTICE! THESE CHILDREN PICTURED HERE, ARE THE LEADERS OF THE RECENT CHILD LABOR REVELUTION, WHO WERE MURDERED, ALSO MURDERED WITH JENNIE ARONBURG, (CALVERINE). IT IS THE WISH OF GENERALS SCHLOEDER AND DARGER FOR ANYONE WHO HAPPENS TO FIND, OR ENTER HERE, SNIEDER'S BARN, TO SOLVE THE MYSTERIES, CONFINED AMONG EACH, AND TO REVENGE THEIR DEATH, UPON ARONBURG, RAYMOND RICHARDSON FEDERAL, AND THOMAS PHELLINIA, WHO ARE THEIR MAIN MURDERERS AN ASSASSINS. THOMAS ARONBURG FEDERAL, RECENT GOVERNOR OF CALVERINE, IS ALSO THEIR MURDERER FOR REFUSING TO PUNISH THE ASSASSINS, WHEN HE HAD THE POWER. THESE REQUESTS ARE NOT FROM THE TWO GENERALS, DARGER AND WHILLIAM SCHLOEDER, BUT FROM THE ANGELINIAN GOVERNMENTS THEMSELVES, AND THOSE WHO MAY COME UPON THIS BARN AND

SEE THIS WILL RECEIVE THE REWARD OF \$1,000,000 IN GOLD, IF SUCCESSFUL AND DEATH IF UNSUCCESSFUL, FOR THE ATTEMPT IS EXCEEDINGLY DANGEROUS, ON ACCOUNT OF THE FURY OF THE THREE GLANDELINIAN CHIEFTAINS. DON'T FAIL! REMEMBER FOR IT IS CERTAIN DEATH, AS THE GLANDELINIAN MEAN ALL THEY THREAT UPON THOSE WHO SHADOW THEM IN ANY WAY.

Darger's signs and notices seem always to exist in a halfway space between reality and the dream. The images he refers to, and the barn as well, probably did exist in Chicago, as did Generals Schloeder and Darger. William Schloeder, Darger's closest, perhaps only, friend may have participated for a time in Henry's delusional world as a member of the Gemini, or Black Brothers Lodge, and as co-creator of the mimic altar. On the other hand, the terrifying events to which the notice refers, incidents of violence and murder, occurred, not in Chicago, but in far-off Abbieannia.

The display panel includes a mysterious eighth picture which has no identifying label (3.33). It is a small painting of a little girl in bed. A young woman smiles down on her sleeping child. Although Henry would almost certainly have identified the child as the murdered Annie Aronburg, it is probably not too far-fetched to see this image as a portrayal of Henry's mother and his lost sister.⁴¹ As we have seen, it was this nebulous sister who was concealed within or behind the picture of Annie Aronburg, the loss of which was one of the principal motivations for Henry's furious anger with God. The mimic altar sought to bring about a miracle: to force God to yield to Henry's prayers and to restore the lost images and manuscripts.

If I am correct in linking this group of pictures with the mimic altar and Schloeder's (or "Snieder's") Barn, then these "portraits" of the Vivian girls would have been assembled and "painted" in 1912, and would probably represent the earliest depictions of *The Realms* in pictorial form. It would be very significant if Darger's involvement with painting and drawing originated in connection with the mimic altar and its magical goals. If the mimic altar included images of the Vivian girls, then it would be immediately evident that, from the first, pictures functioned for Darger in a very different way from our usual conception of them in the context of art. Originating in our world, the small pictures were modified and reidentified so as to make them fit into another. At this early stage he was content with the most minimal alterations, the mere coloring and labeling of borrowed images. But, from the beginning, everything was forced to yield to Darger's imaginative and obsessive reconstruction of reality.

HENRY DARGER suffered all his life from the conviction that he could not draw. This belief, which principally concerned his inability to draw the human face and figure, was never to change. It was one of the fundamental facts of his creative life. Just as his only means of acquiring a child was by adoption, his only way of making pictures of his own was through the borrowing, or adoption, of images (3.34). It is worth considering whether his inability to draw might be connected to massive inhibitions in the sexual realm, and to the lack of knowledge which obstructed his ability to conceive a child.⁴² All of the methods of incorporating images which Darger conceived of over the years (modified images, various forms of collage, carbon and

waxpaper tracing techniques, photographic enlargement and tracing, etc.) were methods of "adoption."

In thinking about Henry's relationship to images, it is essential to lay aside all of our normal assumptions about "art" and the creative process in the artist. His intimate involvement with images, particularly those depicting little girls, was highly unusual, if not unique. All such images, photographs, paintings, illustrations in advertisements, comic books, coloring books, etc., represented abandoned, lost, or uncared for children. He found them thrown away in the trash. These unwanted children/images were brought home to Henry's room. His vast collection of images was like an orphanage full of little children. In his fantasy he adopted all of them.

This is especially evident in his collection of unmodified images. Only a single change was necessary to make them his; it was, however, a bizarre and very significant gesture — the modification of the eyes. Hundreds of photographs and found drawings have penciled additions to the pupil or iris of the eye, in order to make them glisten. It was through this magical ritual that borrowed images were brought to life in Henry's world.⁴³

As Darger's internal images of little girls grew more definite, detailed, and varied, in part as a result of his writing, his need for more precise and highly individualized depictions grew stronger. Simple found images were no longer sufficient because they didn't conform closely enough to his internal vision. While any and all depictions of children went on being "adopted" through the years, he

sought new and more personal means of adapting images to his needs. Even the seven Vivian sisters occasionally needed to be differentiated.

The growing importance of the Vivian girls in his story, and in his life, also seems to have led Darger to want larger images to depict them. He was, however, dependent at this early stage on the sizes of images which were available. Large pictures of little girls, in newspapers or magazines, were still rare. On the few occasions when a large photograph or illustration appeared as a full-page picture, for example on a magazine cover, no more than one or two children would be depicted.

3.34

Henry Darger

Untitled [Cover from the *Ladies Home Journal*]. Retouched in pencil by Darger. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.35

Henry Darger

The Vivian Princesses and Their Brother Penrod. Collage with added tracings and color. The original collage, once a single piece, has broken into five separate fragments.

Segment with two identical little girls (page 151): Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. CAB 11554. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand.

All other segments: Collection of Kiyoko Lerner. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The Vivian Princesses Collage-Drawing⁴⁴

On one occasion, the discovery of a large newspaper photograph (18 inches high), of a seated little girl, provided Darger with a unique opportunity for making an important addition to the decor of his room. A group of five surviving panels, which once formed a single large composition, represent the result of Darger's experiment with unusually large collage fragments (3.35). The largest of the surviving segments of the huge *Vivian Princesses* collage is a darkened and heavily varnished picture of four girls sitting on a bench. The subject is identified by a handwritten caption below:

THE VIVIAN PRINCESSES. THESE LITTLE GIRLS PICTURED HERE IN BEST CLOTHES, LOOK HAPPY HERE, BUT WHAT IS WRITTEN OF THEM WOULD MAKE THE OBSERVER NOT WISH TO BE IN THEIR PLACE. I'LL BET NO SAINT ON EARTH WENT THROUGH A LIFE OF HORRORS, SUFFERING, AND SORROW LIKE THEY DID. JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE GOOD, WICKED FOES EXILED THEM TO DEVILS ISLAND AND A LEPER'S ISLE. OTHER THINGS TOLD ABOUT THEM ARE DREADFUL. THE LITTLE GIRLS SHOWN IN DIFFERENT POSES ARE THEY ALSO, BUT IN DISGUISES. THEY ARE VERY BRAVE, HOLY, AND VERY FORGIVING. THE BOY IN THE PICTURE IS THEIR BROTHER PENROD. TO KNOW ABOUT THEM PROPERLY, THE OBSERVER WILL HAVE TO READ THE LONG STORIES ABOUT THEM.⁴⁵

The basic design unit of this segment of the collage-drawing is a single, unusually large, black-and-white image of a seated child, cut from a newspaper. She wears a short flowing dress, which exposes one knee, and high laced shoes. The newspaper image was cut out, following its contours, and lightly colored by Darger. The cut-out figure then served as a "model," as he traced its main contours.

On two large sheets of paper, joined at the center, he traced this single image three times. He then glued the newspaper cut-out to this backing paper, to create a row of four identical figures seated on a bench. For the first time he created his own architectural interior as a setting for the figures. A simple brown paneled wall behind the girls suggests a narrow stagelike space. A pale green bench with cut out legs rests on a hardwood floor. Sitting on the bench, the four girls dangle their legs, their feet not quite touching the ground.

The three figures which had been traced onto the page were then painted in deep, almost opaque color. Darger was interested in uniforms, and clearly enjoyed the challenging task of inventing suitably rich matching outfits for the Vivian girls. Their "best clothes" on this occasion consist of deep maroon dresses, with a short capelike collar which covers their shoulders, replacing sleeves. The hems of the collars and dresses are ornamented with Darger's own border decorations, which differ from one figure to the next. He has also added a yellow fringe to the edge of the

dresses and capes. The bow at the waist is derived from the original newspaper photograph which may have been a fashion illustration. The child in that advertisement has bare legs, short socks, and high laced shoes. Darger, however, has provided his young heroines with crimson stockings and bright yellow boots, pushing them in terms of fashion backwards in time.

Still unsure of his ability to draw or even trace faces, or perhaps dissatisfied with the result of trying, he arrived at a strikingly unconventional and unexpected solution. Three of the girls are equipped with large cut-out heads derived from a variety of sources and glued on. Surprisingly, the girl whose body is composed of the original newspaper cut-out is also provided with a new head from a magazine photograph. The two girls at right, whose bodies are fully traced and painted by Darger, were each given a different collaged head: one looking upwards, the other looking shyly down at the floor.

These borrowed heads presented Darger with a problem. Printed in black and white, they couldn't really be turned into blondes, even with the application of yellow paint. Since the Vivian sisters are all blondes, this was far from satisfactory. Accordingly, for the fourth head, he did a careful tracing of the face and hair. This little miss, carefully traced in line, looks upward, her eyes dramatically defined, her skin painted in flesh tones, her lips touched with crimson — the first completely traced large figure in Darger's oeuvre.

The four little sisters represent an astonishing example of Henry at work, experimenting with new techniques, suddenly aware of new and surprising possibilities. Some of the ideas (for example, using collage fragments or tracings of separate heads) are unique to him. True collage was fast yielding to drawing. We are witnessing Darger's early evolution as an artist struggling to find an appropriate means of embodying a deeply personal vision. The new techniques he employed here would serve him far more masterfully in the future. For the present, he was dependent on finding suitably large images which he could cut out and then trace.

At left, three smaller additional girls were added to the picture. Two of them are collage cut-outs, beautifully overlapped, but differing radically in tonality. Equipped with a real sense of humor, Darger has glued in a newspaper photograph of a lamb nuzzling up against the little girl who holds a bouquet of flowers. Finally, at far left, he has traced a much smaller image of a very little girl with her arm around a big dog. Derived from a different source again, she is fully traced with no collage fragments added. Sitting on a small bench, she appears relaxed and comfortable. The most primitive feature of the segment is her dog, a wonderfully crude beast which contrasts strangely with the cut-out lamb. This smaller grouping of three children, who should not be confused with the larger Vivian girls, is depicted outside, silhouetted against green grass and a distant horizon. The whole future of Henry's art is seen in this segment in a nascent stage. The discovery of the true collage-drawing technique had begun.

In a photograph of Darger's room taken after his death, the large piece we have just examined (24 inches high x 45 inches long) hangs just below the ceiling on the door wall, as the first image in a row of four related pictures. The final segment at right has broken into two halves since the photograph was made. Study of the five segments has convinced me that all five images once formed part of a single long collage, which broke apart at some point, probably during transportation to the new room.⁴⁶ One proof of this hypothesis is the reference in the attached label to a boy in the picture, their brother Penrod. The segment to which the label is attached contains no boys. But one of the detached segments does. As well, all of the segments are unified in style, color, and technique. If we examine all five surviving fragments of the work, it becomes apparent that the large standing and seated figures depict the seven Vivian sisters and their brother, in roughly identical outfits, surrounded by numerous other smaller children. Reassembled, the work would surpass the great battle collage in length, though not in height.⁴⁷ Both in its size, and in the radical freedom of its experimental techniques and space construction, it is a crucially important transitional work, the link between Darger's early dependence on various types of collage and the mature drawings. For this reason we will examine it in detail.

In each of the smaller segments, one or two large images serve as the dominant form around which that section of the composition was designed. Each segment introduces further experimental features which carry Darger in the direction of what was to be his mature style.

The composition seen in segment one is continued without interruption in segment two. The bench extends across both panels, but now appears without any little girls sitting on it. Instead, two very small children are sitting on the floor in front of the bench. Neither of these little girls were probably intended as Vivian girls; they are too young. They are also oddly identical, having been traced from the same source, a cut-out picture of a little girl which Darger used as a collage fragment in segment five. Despite the fact that these little girls are identical in contour, and seated side by side, they are subtly different. Their faces, and especially their eyes, demonstrate the changes possible when making a tracing-drawing. Henry has imbued the faces with unusually intense emotion. The composition, the upper half of which is completely empty, is extremely unusual, and works only when segment two is fitted into the whole sequence.⁴⁸



3.35 continued

Other segments of the long collage are still more daring. In segment three, Darger has added large collage elements to the background, cut-out houses and trees, obtained from magazines. Standing in front of, and overlapping these buildings, are a variety of children, also applied to the surface as cut-outs. These small figures, no longer in rows, are subtly overlapped in sophisticated groupings. The segment is dominated by two large figures traced onto the sheet. In that they both are outfitted in red-dress uniforms, we may assume they were intended as two of the Vivian sisters. One of the children is seated on the ground in the right corner, the lower part of her body cut off by the frame. The faces of both children have been added using collage fragments. The seated child holds a collaged bouquet.

Segment four presents one of the Vivian sisters in a dress similar to those we saw in the first segment. A single large standing figure has been traced onto the sheet and then painted. Once again her head is a collage fragment cut out and added to the surface: a black-and-white newspaper photograph with traces of much faded yellow paint in the hair. Darger added a hand-drawn maroon ribbon to the hair. Around her he created a simple landscape background, composed of large trees drawn freehand. The surface of the sheet was then painted with foliage, lightly suggested in pale green. Around the trunks of the trees he has added tiny collage fragments, additional little girlfriends cut from fashion illustrations. The tremendous difference in size between these little figures and the large main figure forces us to imagine a deep recession into space, the kind of arbitrary spatial manipulation which Darger would, in time, come to handle with supreme inventiveness.

A deeply puzzling feature of this segment also seems to point to the future. In areas where the delicate collage fragments depicting the small children have broken away, it is possible to see, underneath the applied paper fragment, a fully traced and painted version of the same figure. It is difficult to explain why he would have covered over this painted figure, by gluing the identical collage fragment on top. Only one of the small children survives completely as a traced and painted drawing with no collage additions.⁴⁹ It is she, free of all glued-on additions, who most evidently represents the future of Darger's art.

Perhaps the most intriguing panel is segment five, at far right, which depicts the little boy Penrod. The standing boy is not a collage, but a fully traced figure. The head appears oddly small on the large body, and may have been traced separately from a different source, which may have been a girl's head, rather than a boy's. Tremendous effort went into designing a uniform for Penrod, loaded with elaborate gold braid, reflecting the dress uniforms of the Vivian girls, but appropriate for a boy. The blood-red color of this uniform is so dark and heavy that one wonders if Darger was experimenting with a mixture of varnish and pigment.

Two little girls are seated at Penrod's feet, neatly fitted into the corners. Both of these children involve collage fragments, cut out and glued onto the page. The one at right was taken from a colored magazine illustration, the other; at left, from a black-and-white source, which Henry then painted. This little girl, at left, was also the source for the two tracings of little girls on segment two. By using collage fragments, and repeated tracings of these, at various points in his long picture, Darger

was able to achieve a curious unity over the whole length of the work. Oddly, these repetitions don't reveal themselves easily; it is quite possible to examine the work without realizing how many repeated figures are involved.

The eight little girls, arranged in groups of four to either side of Penrod, were cut from fashion illustrations and glued in. Beneath seven of the figures, Darger has printed single letters, A, H, D, C, V, J, and J, which serve to identify all seven of the Vivian sisters by name. These would be the Vivian girls in different poses and in disguises, referred to in the printed label on segment one. It is unfortunate that the full-scale portraits of the seven Vivian sisters were not similarly identified.

IN CONTRAST to Darger's mature drawings, the *Vivian Princesses* collage-drawing appears both very old and pictorially conservative. It is undoubtedly old, older perhaps than *The Battle of Calverhine*.⁵⁰ It therefore comes as a surprise that, when examined more closely, it emerges as a radically experimental work, all but overwhelmed by barely reconciled technical innovations. Some of these experimental procedures were later abandoned, for example, the use of "collaged heads" on traced bodies. However, other techniques, introduced for the first time in this large work, were to form the basis of Darger's later working method. It was in these experimental collages that the processes of discovery actually took place. These darkened images conceal the origins of Darger's art.

The use of a long and very narrow compositional format, encountered here for the first time, became Darger's standard field of operations: an elongated horizontal scroll-like format that is unusual in Western art. It seems to have provided a vast field of activity in which his generally complex pictorial narratives could be contained. In that most scenes from *The Realms* involve, not one, but seven heroines, unusual amounts of horizontal space were required to fit them all in. Within this narrow, ribbon-like compositional field Darger invariably succeeded in creating an illusion of real depth.

To achieve this, radical shifts in the scale of the figures used were essential. In this work, Darger successfully, and for the first time, employed large-scale figures which all but fill the narrow vertical space available. Although such very large figures were always difficult for him to obtain, they were to play an important role in many of his later drawings. Sudden shifts from extremely large figures to very small subordinate figures force the viewer to accept dramatic and arbitrary plunges into deep space.

In this work, where the use of collage was still very important, he also displays an unusual ability to use the overlap of elements to suggest both depth and subtle effects of human intimacy or relationship. Particularly unusual, in fact rare anywhere in the history of pictorial art, is the use of identical repeated figures in a "realistic" composition. Initially Darger may have been forced to use this odd device because of his inability to obtain enough large-scale figures. In this work he employed all kinds of variations of costume, color, and detail to conceal this curiously unnatural

procedure. Later, he would employ it with evident delight, introducing friezes of identical figures with no attempt at concealment. In purely formal terms (of little interest to Darger), they function as a marvelously decorative unifying device. More importantly, for this artist, they represented an overt reminder that the supposedly distinct seven Vivian sisters are all but indistinguishable in both text and pictures.

In his later work Darger obviously enjoyed creating various interior and exterior settings within which his borrowed figures could operate and his fantastic narratives unfold. In this early work a favorite compositional device appears for the first time. At left, an interior space that is both shallow and parallel to the frontal plane; then a sudden shift to an outdoor setting, and a deep spatial recession to a distant horizon. Although the version of the device used here is relatively simple, it anticipates numerous more complex and subtle variations on the theme which were to follow.

Most important for the future of Darger's art was the gradual abandonment of the use of pure collage as a technique for obtaining and incorporating images. For the first time, large-scale tracing-drawings were used as a means of introducing major figures. The change is particularly noticeable in this work, where both techniques are in use side by side, and even within individual figures. It would have become clear to Darger that the traced figures permitted far greater possibilities of adapting images to his particular needs. The collage fragment invariably introduced far too much of its original nature and sources. Even with the addition of color and heavy overpaint, these

borrowed fragments couldn't be successfully blended into the composition. The use of traced images, on the other hand, permitted all kinds of changes of costume, detail, color, and even emotional content.

For the moment, Darger's fear of drawing faces led him to make use of collaged fragments for the heads of his figure, a device which, as original, even bizarre, as it was, was not entirely successful. Therefore, even here, he took the risk of introducing several heads and complete bodies that were fully traced, and which functioned at least as effectively as the collage faces. The odd idea of utilizing collage fragments and drawing in a single figure was therefore not used again. The future lay with drawing, rather than with collage, and with the introduction of borrowed figures through tracing.

Darger and Drawing

In investigating Darger's extensive early involvement with collage, we have become aware that his mode of assembling borrowed images was essentially self-invented, and inspired by motives remote from those we would normally associate with this art form. In that the term "collage" implies a variety of definitions, assumptions, and procedures derived from twentieth-century art practice, it might have been preferable to employ a new term to describe Darger's various methods and motivations. The work of Outsider artists invariably forces us to reexamine the standard terminology used in discussing art, demanding that we rethink all of our assumptions about the creative process.

If we turn now to the other half of the equation "collage-drawing," we will discover that Darger's conception of "drawing" was similarly idiosyncratic and unconventional. Indeed, for some, the use of the term "drawings" to refer to the product of Darger's various graphic procedures presents serious problems. What is a Darger drawing?

Alongside of the thousands of images clipped from magazines and newspapers, Darger's room contained hundreds of small drawings which he had made over many years. Compared with his large painted compositions, which were fully completed and bound together as books, these small fragmentary drawings would normally be understood as "sketches." Since the majority bear an evident relationship to figures appearing in the large

paintings, the small works might also be termed "studies." Never exhibited or reproduced, they have been seen as insignificant, even embarrassing, by-products of his image-making process. In the context of our customary assumptions about drawings and the act of drawing, they would normally be seen as of little value, in that they are, almost without exception, direct "tracings" of other images, images not made by Darger. In many cases the original picture from which they were traced can still be found in the room. In depicting the human figure, and many other subjects as well, he did not "draw," he made tracings. Evidence of these transfer procedures were also to be found in his room, with many drawings preserved only on fragments of waxpaper, or on used sheets of carbon paper.⁵¹

All of these vestiges of Darger's image-making activity are of enormous importance in revealing aspects of his creative process. As well, despite the fact that in almost all cases tracing was involved, the drawings themselves possess value, reflecting far more of Darger's reality than we might expect of tracings. In order to properly evaluate these graphic fragments, we have to obtain a clearer understanding of Darger's unique conception of drawing, and to free ourselves of ideas derived from more conventional art practice. For example, terms such as "sketch" or "study" scarcely have any meaning when applied to his work. The concept of a sketch, as a rapid or abbreviated graphic note made either from life or from imagination, would not have occurred to him. He didn't draw in this manner. Similarly, the idea

of making *studies* in preparation for larger, more finished works, would have been completely outside of his experience, despite the fact that his preparatory procedures were far more elaborate than those used by most professional artists. It is probable that Darger knew almost nothing of traditional methods of drawing, and very little about art in general. His room contained almost nothing that would suggest he was interested in "fine art" or in famous artists.⁵²

Darger's aesthetic is reflected in a dramatic scene in which his alter ego Penrod, alone in his room on the night of a great snowstorm, thinks to himself about drawing. Penrod's heroic effort to capture the supernatural beauty of the Vivian sisters would have been familiar to Darger. Unable to sleep, he, too, often drew far into the night.

He had learned to draw pictures and maps, and also could make an accurate and quick sketch of the most keen eyed clever aquiline face of anyone with the well cut and delicately closed mouth which looked as if it always had been shut upon secrets. If he had only the time to draw he would try and make a sketch of the Vivian Girls as he imagined they looked, he found himself saying over and over again. He knew he could draw and paint many kinds of pictures, correctly and roughly. Very often he had amused himself by making countless sketches of all things he wished to ask important questions about. Even like a good artist, he had sketched and drawn faces of some great generals he knew, and

3.36

Henry Darger

Untitled [Child
Ballerina]. Coloring
book page mounted
on cardboard, color
added by Darger.
6 1/2 x 10 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



general Greatheart had declared the boy had an unusual gift for so rapidly catching a person's likeness.

Penrod after some considerable thoughts believed he could make a sketch of the faces of the Vivian Girls, and also their father's, which would show general Greatheart that he knew and could recognize at least Emperor Vivian. He decided to make this attempt because he felt sure he could not sleep because of the din of the tremendous cannonade. He therefore rose up, jumped from his cot, and went to a small table near the window. He drew from a drawer a pencil, and a tablet of writing paper without lines.

The blizzard outside seemed now to be at its worse, and the wind was occasionally throwing great quantities of snow against the window pane, and the blinding snow sheet outside hiding objects for a hundred feet made it lighter. By this he could see to do his drawing. He drew up his small chair, sat by the table, and began his drawing. For about thirty minutes he worked steadily and succeeded on the face of Emperor Vivian, but tore up five or six sketches of the Vivian Girls, that proved very unsatisfactory. The hasty sketching would not matter to Penrod if he could catch their beautiful, queenly, subtle and innocent half frightened look, and a look which was not vanity, slyness, but something more pretty, holy lovable, dignified and important. Often he got the marked

aristocratic features or outlines of the features, which he absolutely knew were not there, despite their rank. Any ordinary person, man, woman or child, who have a less pronounced profile, would have been to Penrod's idea, less or more easy to draw or sketch. And he did his best, his level best, to recall to his mind every detail of them which had come so often to his memory though its well trained habit. Soon, to his relief, he observed that he was drawing the likeness to a clearer point but gradually. And it was not long before the features were clear enough to strike him surely "AS WELL DONE," and also that of Emperor Vivian.⁵³

Darger's conception of drawing was derived from three major sources: coloring books, newspaper comic strips, and illustrations of children's fashions. Although we have no evidence that Darger used coloring books as a child, his intense interest in them as an adult is supported by the thousands of pages from coloring books preserved in his room. He also used "framed" pictures from coloring books as decorations on the walls (3.36). He loved them because they contained drawings of children, particularly little girls. The images in most coloring books are thematically connected. Some coloring books make use of a story line, with the illustrations conforming to the narrative sequence, and with a short text inserted at the bottom of each page. These conform closely to Darger's conception of art as narrative illustration.



3.37 opposite

Anonymous left
Untitled [Little Miss Muffet]. Page cut by Darger from a coloring book. 9 3/4 x 8 in.

Henry Darger center
Untitled [Little Miss Muffet]. Carbon paper tracing on Manila paper. 11 3/4 x 7 1/2 in.

Henry Darger right
Untitled [Frightened little girl]. Tracing drawing eliminating all accompanying detail. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.
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Coloring books are particularly important to us in that they embody most clearly Darger's innocent conception of drawing. The simplified contours drawn with heavy lines, the bold and uncomplicated closed shapes, the relatively simple spatial structure, with limited background detail, and the obvious narrative content of each illustration, present Darger's graphic aesthetic in its purest form.⁵⁴ A drawing was a simple image, bounded by firm contours, and made to be filled in with color. Since he despaired of ever being able to draw in this "realistic" manner, he employed tracing as a means of liberating these images of children from their original context (3.37). Carbon paper, and the act of tracing, served as a means of both of capturing the image, and of freeing it from its environment. Little Miss Muffet, freed of all accompanying detail, including the spider, becomes simply a badly frightened little girl fleeing from something. The transition can be understood as moving, as well, from the simple preoccupations of childhood, to the vastly more complex obsessions of an adult involved with children.

At the same time, everything was being examined as potential illustrative material for *The Realms*. This is particularly evident in the case of a coloring book which depicted children in the unlikely context of war. A crucial indication of the importance for Darger possessed by a specific borrowed image is the evidence of tracing and retracing preserved on its surface. Some images have been traced so often that the contour of the image has been all but cut out of the paper. This is the case here.

Two waxpaper tracings of this image are also preserved. In the first, it is evident that Darger was interested in both boy soldiers and in their guns, evidently seeing them as suitable participants in *The Realms* (3.38). Both figures are carefully traced, with only the background eliminated. Their function in *The Realms* is revealed by the modifications to the original coloring-book drawing introduced by Darger. This change to the original is reflected in a second waxpaper tracing, in which only the standing boy is drawn, and in which the combat helmet of the boy soldier is redrawn as a square academic cap, or mortarboard, the main identifying feature of the Glandelinian troops. He first modified the coloring-book page, then traced the new image of a boy Glandelinian. As we will see, almost invariably, modifications of an image were introduced by Darger as early in the process as possible. Usually, it was the original image that he chose to modify. It was essential to him that images in his possession conformed to his alternate world from the beginning. They could then be fitted into *The Realms* when needed, in various ways. For Darger, outlining or tracing was a magical act, similar to the primitive method of claiming possession by outlining a figure or its shadow. It is possible that in Darger's case, coloring an image also implied possession. All such procedures, seen from the primitive point of view, are both magical and aggressive.⁵⁵

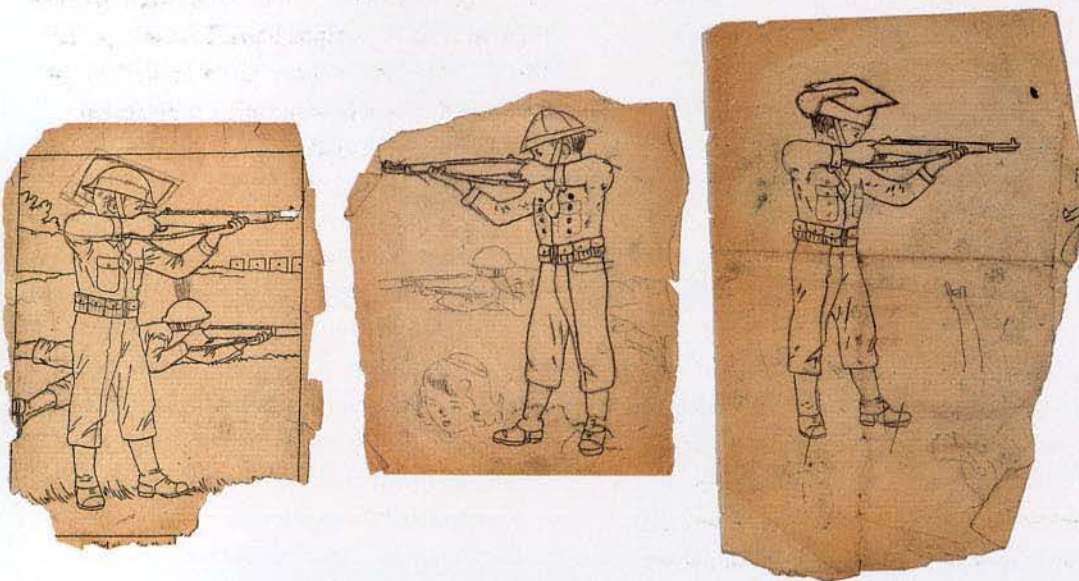
3.38

Henry Darger

Untitled [Boy soldiers]. Coloring book page with slight modifications and evidence of tracing by Darger. 10 x 7 1/2 in.

Henry Darger

Untitled [Boy Soldiers]. Waxed-paper tracing and drawing, one with modified mortar-board hat included. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



A SECOND FUNDAMENTAL source of Darger's graphic aesthetic, and of his drawing style, was derived from newspaper comic strips and comic books. In these illustrations the narrative element is far more obviously present, with a series of panels carrying the story forward. It is of interest that Darger seldom utilized this system of sequential illustration.⁵⁶ His favorite comic strips were those which featured little girls, particularly *Little Orphan Annie* and her newspaper rival, "Little Annie Rooney," Henry's favorite strip.⁵⁷ In that children played an important part in many of these comic strips, with little girls functioning as heroines, and interacting on equal terms with adults, they provided a crucially important source both for his writings and for his illustrations. Other comic book illustrations attracted his attention when, from time to time, Darger noticed parallels with his alternate world. For example, a strip from the series "Mandrake the Magician" depicted the birth from a meteorite egg of a curious, life-sized, winged creature similar to Blengins⁵⁸ (3.39). Such images were immediately cut out and saved.

Darger's childlike sense of humor was stimulated by cartoons and comic strips designed for children. He enjoyed the whole range of humanized animals, birds, ducks, mice, etc., created by Walt Disney (1901-66) and other cartoonists. In one of the collage-drawings, Donald Duck appears as a cut-out portrait hanging on the wall. But talking animals and the zany humor of the animated cartoon did not really correspond to the troubled world emerging in *The Realms*, though it is not unknown for famous cartoon characters to be cut out and incorporated as collage in some of the illustrations (see 7.30, p. 410-411). Given his love of these creatures from the "funnies," a way had

Lee Falk and Phil Davis
Mandrake the Magician.
 Six panels of a comic
 strip, no date. Collec-
 tion of the American
 Folk Art Museum,
 New York.



to be found for bringing them into the picture. Darger's solution was both brilliant and inspired: he found them as ghostly presences in the clouds!

Far to the southeast was a black sea of rolling smoke clouds ... It rose far above them into banks of rolling clouds which constantly shifted position and changed color. The blues and grays were very beautiful even though it was all smoke, and the two brave little girls noticed that seemingly on the cloud banks seemed to sit or recline fleecy shadowy forms almost like some strange beings of another world. "I'm glad those ghostly shadowy forms are not real" said Penrod in a awed voice. "Of course they ain't," replied Violet softly, while Daisy giggled. "There ain't such things as spooks, ghosts, or phantoms." "I didn't say they were," said Penrod with a smile. "I believe in them though only if I see them in person, and have witnesses to prove it is not a fake. Nevertheless, those shapes seem like open work. If I should squeeze one, there would not be anything left of it."⁵⁹

Here again we may be approaching some of Henry's early experiences, when as a boy he scanned the changing patterns of clouds in the Illinois skies. Perhaps the forms he discovered there did awaken anxiety at times, even the fear of ghosts. Some of the cloud forms in the collage-drawings are frightening, strange presences taking shape in the unreal. But for the most part, the creatures in the clouds are cartoon characters, fantastic birds and animals, borrowed from the comics and traced into the sky, whimsical witnesses of the less than humorous events taking place down below.

Other strips provided background material, plants, houses, stylized explosions, etc. Here too, it was the graphic style of the illustrations which exerted a profound influence on Darger's conception of drawing. The clear and simple outline drawing style, and the flat shapes filled with intense color, were a crucial source of his personal graphic style. They also provided an important source of images of aggressive adults in uniform.⁶⁰ While he seldom adopted the sequential narrative panels, he was obviously inspired by the simplified compositions and space construction of the comic strip drawing style. On occasion, their influence went much further, as he borrowed whole images, tracing figures so as to remove them from the strip for use in his own compositions. This was particularly the case with the strip "Little Annie Rooney," whose heroine was to enter to a considerable extent into his art. A fundamental obstacle, however, to Darger's employing comic strip images in his large compositions was their small size. This problem had to be solved before these important images could enter significantly into his work.

Almost no image could enter his realm unmodified; everything entering his room and his mind was forced to submit to change. In some cases the changes were quite radical, not to say bizarre. An example is provided by a panel from "Little Annie Rooney" (3.40). Two little girls dressed in bathing suits are seen on board a ship. Responding to an image, and perhaps a situation, which excited him, Darger began at once to modify the original image. Obviously interested in what lay beneath the bathing suits, he satisfied himself by drawing in what he knew to be there. In the case of the child standing with her legs slightly apart, this would involve the addition of male genitals. In this case, however, he wanted to go further. Using carbon paper beneath the original drawing, he outlined the bodies of both children, taking advantage of the technique to entirely eliminate their clothes. At this stage he had not added male genitals to their naked bodies. (3.41). The resulting carbon drawing is found on the reverse of the original image. He then added immense ram's horns, traced from another image, transforming both children into Blengins. Study of the two images side by side, indicates just how radical Darger's "tracing" procedures really were. The carbon drawing enables us to see what Darger saw when he looked at this cartoon, allowing us to follow him step by step as he eliminated everything that was not essential, and as he added all that, from his point of view, was. While tracing played a part in determining every line of his drawing, the final image departs so radically from the original as to become a completely new drawing, inspired by motives which would have been incomprehensible to the cartoon illustrator. The result is a true Darger drawing, reflective far more of his personality than of anything to be

found in the original prototype which he made use of in the construction of his image.

A separate sheet exists on which he used both carbon and then pencil to trace a single figure from the same cartoon panel (3.42). In this case he isolated the figure of Annie, the girl heroine, depicting her naked, with the addition of male genitals. While anyone familiar with the strip could identify the model behind this drawing, they would inevitably respond to it with considerable confusion. Since naked children never appeared in comic strips, this drawing, even without male genitals, would demand explanation. The bizarre sexual transformation raises psychological issues so vast as to completely undermine any attempt at identification with the comic strip heroine, or with the artist Darrell McClure.

In selecting this panel from the strip, from among hundreds of others, Darger intuitively responded to a powerful erotic undertone that is undeniably present in it. It has to be admitted that the professional illustrator's depiction of the little girls betrays aspects of a far more adult sexuality. His suggestively nubile children, with their seductive poses and carefully arranged hair, are oddly knowing.⁶¹ They seem more than aware of the virile young sailors, one of whom approaches with a spurting hose which splashes around their feet. Inherent in the panel, and perhaps to a degree in the whole series, is an element of perverse eroticism, an adult sexuality which has as its object childlike women. The contrast with Darger's puzzlingly adolescent sexual feelings is very marked, and is clearly evident in his transcription of the drawing. The numerous changes he introduces in his tracing might be interpreted as the result of serious

lack of ability in simply tracing a drawing. However, the troublingly consistent process of change which modifies his line, while unconscious, is not without meaning.

In the comic strip we encounter the graphic slickness of a professional illustrator who makes use of a host of pictorial devices: childlike hands, knobby knees, prominent collar bones, the open mouth and nose defined only by a tiny line, little tricks of the trade which Darger fails to understand. Each of these little details changes in his version. His line, and the body it encompasses, is possessed by a curious air of innocence and naiveté which is not merely a sign of artistic inability. His line registers his emotion, his inner vision of a little girl. Even the penis, which he secretes among the folds of the skirt in the original drawing, appears to belong perfectly to the body of his naked little girl. It resembles her tiny fingers, which have also changed because of his inability to draw the hand. Her eyes are carefully traced and yet are so different, lost and unknowing. His version of the child, despite the fact that it is traced line for line, has grown convincingly younger, more vulnerable, unmistakably more innocent. With every stroke he reveals himself: his own innocence, his tentative and adolescent sexuality. Although he has followed the lines as closely as possible, the resulting drawing is unmistakably his. In almost every case, we are dealing with a radically original drawing, a small masterpiece of Outsider Art, a drawing which allows us to participate to a remarkable degree in the internal processes involved in the creation of an alternate world. Paradoxically, no matter how many different originals he took as models, the finished tracing drawing is always a Darger.

3.40 opposite, left
Darrell McClure
Untitled [Two little girls aboard ship]. Original cartoon from "Little Annie Rooney," drawn by Darrell McClure and written by Brandon Walsh. ©1948 King Features Syndicate.

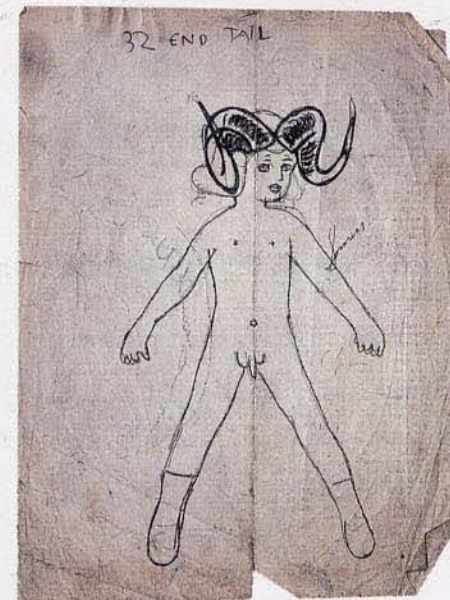
3.41 opposite, center
Henry Darger
Untitled [Two naked little girls with rams horns]. Carbon tracing. Collection of the American Museum of Folk Art, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.42 opposite, right
Henry Darger
Untitled [Naked girl with added penis]. Drawing in carbon and pencil on manila paper. 10 5/8 x 8 in. Collection of the American Museum of Folk Art, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Another modified drawing of a little girl, derived from a different source, represents a similar figure, in this case with both horns and male genitals (3.43). The lower legs and feet appear to be additions by Darger, correcting an image which was interrupted at this point. Additions to an original drawing always represented a serious problem for Darger. In such situations he often traced the additions from another image. As his confidence grew, he would combine various body parts derived from various sources, changing arm and leg positions at will. A waxpaper drawing preserves vestiges of such processes, depicting isolated arms in various positions (3.44). The addition of rams' horns was a complex process. Darger saved images of these sheep, isolating their horns through tracing (3.45). Equipped with tracings of horns of various sizes, he could usually find a pair to fit on any head (3.46). This waxpaper drawing of a Blengin's head and horns provides evidence that such heads were being transferred onto other bodies. On many borrowed drawings, one can see the incisions made by a stylus as the horns were traced separately through the original and through the carbon paper to form the new image of a Blengin. It is evident that unless it was completely impossible to find an appropriate model, Darger carefully avoided freehand drawing. He went to incredible lengths to combine suitable tracings into a single image.

While it is possible to account for all such changes on the basis of his inability to draw, I believe this explanation is totally insufficient. It seems probable that the act of tracing was of great importance in itself, that it corresponded to a deep need in him which had nothing to do with technical inability. To draw means to bring into existence an image which has not previously existed; it can be equated with biological processes of conception and birth. Tracing makes no such claim. It is a mode of *adopting* an image that is already in existence, and of moving it from one environment to another. It is a means of achieving physical contact and of obtaining possession.⁶²



3.43 left
Henry Darger
Untitled [Naked Blengin with male genitals, inscription reads "32 end tail"]. Very light carbon tracing line reinforced with heavy pencil contours. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.44 lower left
Henry Darger
Untitled [Body parts. Left shoulder, arm bent at elbow, and hand. Right arm and hand with extended index finger. Additional hand and arm fragment]. Waxed-paper transfer drawing. 8 x 10 1/2 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

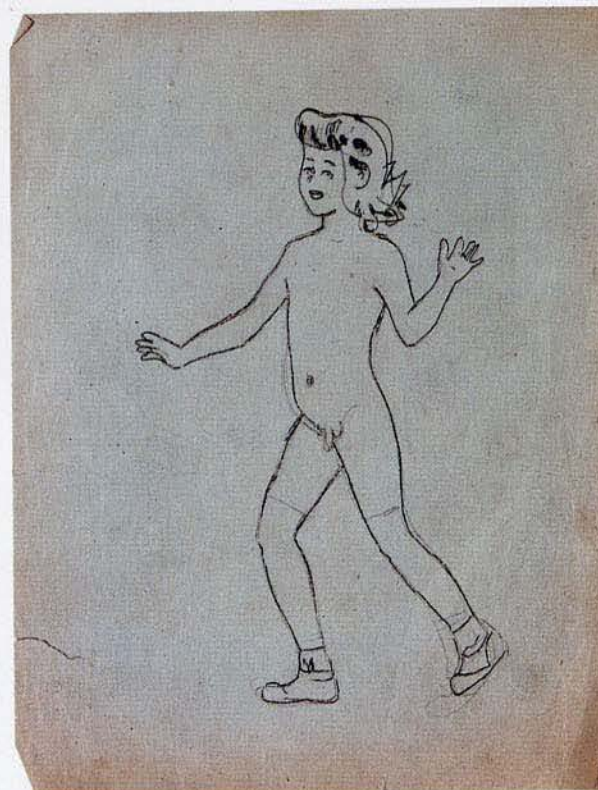
3.45 opposite, left
Anonymous
Untitled [Ram's Head]. Magazine clipping with clear evidence of pencil tracing on ram's horns. 10 3/4 x 6 in. Collection of the American Museum of Folk Art, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.46 opposite, center and right
Henry Darger
Untitled [Tracing drawing of horns from magazine clipping, and (right) head of a Blengin with elaborate horns]. Waxed-paper transfer drawing. 8 x 5 1/4 in. Collection of the American Museum of Folk Art, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



FASHION ILLUSTRATIONS of children's clothes provided Darger with a third significant source of images of children, a source which we have seen him exploiting in his early collages. These drawings, which he collected hundreds of, also influenced his drawing style and provided pictures of little girls which he could trace (3.47). Here too he felt free to modify the original image in accord with his internal reality and drives, with no less astonishing results (3.48).

While his conscious modifications are invariably significant, it is the unconscious "errors" in tracing that give these images their striking originality. He was confused by the hair, the hands, and the shoes, which he retained because he couldn't risk drawing feet. But beyond inability, Darger's drawings are invariably sensuous, he gently feels his way beneath the folds of clothing, with his uncertain line expressing the awkward groping of an inexperienced adolescent uncertain of what he will encounter. His imagination, not his knowledge, is used to fill in the gaps. Lost in fantasy, he eliminates the roller skates of the original image, so that the little girl of his dreams appears to be floating in space, her eyes closed like those of a sleepwalker. While fashion drawings were readily available, providing a wonderful variety of little girls in various poses, they tended all too often to be disappointingly small, smaller certainly than Darger's increasing ambition demanded. His compulsive involvement in tracing could not provide any means of enlarging the image. A solution had to be found.



3.47 far left

Anonymous

Untitled [Two little girls in bathing costumes]. Newspaper fashion illustration. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.

3.48 left

Henry Darger

Untitled [Little girl with bathing costume removed]. Carbon paper tracing of image at left with clothing omitted and penis added. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.49 below
Envelope from Foster
Drugs, dated May 14,
1947, containing a 3 x
2 1/2 in. advertisement
for athletes foot
powder, cut from a
magazine. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

3.50 far right
Cartoon drawing cut
from a newspaper,
and matching
11 x 14 in. negative
enlargement.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



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Please specify whether oversize or contact prints
are desired from miniature films. (Smaller than
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						124	35mm

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Photographic Enlargement

In 1944, Darger found the solution to the puzzle, and to the problem which had, until then, obstructed the emergence of what was to be his mature style. In that year he began to make use of photographic processes of enlargement as a means of obtaining images of a suitably large size. It is doubtful that he had any unusual interest in photography in itself, and he did not own a camera.⁶³ He relied instead on his local drug store, and on the standard enlargement services offered there.⁶⁴ The largest prints available were 11 x 14 inch enlargements, and this was what he usually ordered. Inevitably, the easy availability of images of this standard size influenced the character of his drawn images, and the dimensions of his compositions. The height of his compositions was largely determined by the height of the tallest images available to him. There were no such limitations on the width of his pictures, and these accordingly grew longer as his cast of characters was enlarged. However, the number of different figures at his disposal depended upon his ability to pay for expensive photographic processes. Since he had no means of making photographs himself, he depended upon the local Kodak lab to prepare a negative, and then the enlarged 11 x 14 inch print. Over the years, his "cast" of images grew ever larger. Since he used most of the enlarged images again and again, he was soon able to draw on his collection of enlargements for a wide variety of suitable images, without having to repeat individual figures too frequently.⁶⁵

The collection of 246 photographic enlargements survived in Henry's room. It provides extraordinary possibilities of obtaining insight into his creative process. It is this cast of characters, in various sizes and manifestations, which lies at the heart of his mature work. He saved everything. Scattered around his room were all the remnants of his involvement with photography: the yellow drug-store envelopes provided by Kodak, which still contain the photographic negatives; and in many cases as well, the tiny original pictures cut from newspapers and magazines which he sent to be enlarged (3.49). Since many of the envelopes bear the date when Darger took the image to the store, we have a uniquely accurate means of determining when a specific image first appeared in his work⁶⁶ (3.50).



3.51

Envelope (11 x 14 in.) containing sixteen photographic enlargements, labeled in Darger's hand, "No. One. Not hun de bun. Undress Blengins, naked de haked." ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Darger kept his prints in large brown envelopes provided by the Kodak labs, hand-labeling each envelope according to its contents. He established his own filing system, grouping the images in various ways which, again, are enormously valuable in understanding how he worked and thought (3.51). Through the inscriptions written by Darger on the envelopes, we obtain very specific insight into what the various images in the envelopes meant to him.⁶⁷ For example, an envelope containing enlargements of pictures of little girls running is identified as "Vivian Girls on the run." Six other envelopes also have labels identifying the contents as pictures of the Vivian girls. Darger's notes to himself are often quite peculiar, revealing his childish sense of humor and his delight in clang associations. "Vivian Girls, New pictures, No. Three, on ze spree, de hee hee hee." The same envelope also contains an image identified as a "little girl on the run," with a note to himself suggesting "maybe draw in massacre picture." We begin to realize that he usually saw the pictures he cut out as depictions of specific individuals, or classes of individuals, from *The Realms*, and that he visualized, from the start, their use in specific situations, and even in specific compositions.

On the other hand, several envelopes are identified as containing pictures of his favorite comic strip character, Little Annie Rooney. "One child, Annie Rooney, to be drawn only once." She appears to have functioned in a special intermediate position somewhere between day-to-day reality and the Realms of the Unreal. Once transferred into a large composition, however, she could be transformed into one or more of the Vivian sisters.

The arrival of a set of new enlargements must always have been an exciting moment, inspiring the creation of fresh compositions and subjects. For example, certain types of images were associated by Darger with the "Blengiglomenean Creatures" which he had invented. No less than eleven envelopes contain prints identified as depicting "Blengiglomenean Creatures, believe it or not." Some are described as "Undress Blengins, naked de haked," others as "Blengins with Wings." He distinguished, as well, between pictures of Blengins "drawn always," "New Blengins," and pictures which he states are "to be drawn only once." It appears that he kept track of the number of times he used a given image. No list of such repeated uses has been found as yet, nor do we know why certain images were intended to be used on only one occasion ("Four keeds to be drawn only once"), while others were "drawn always." There are also envelopes containing prints which Darger labeled as "not to draw." Occasionally he wasn't sure: "One girl, with someone's finger under chin. Maybe sketch, maybe not." The vast majority of images are enlarged drawings of children, mostly girls, but other prints provided him with large-scale images of exotic plants, clouds, various animals, etc. What we seldom find, and this is difficult to explain, are depictions of adults, soldiers, generals, either Glandelinians or Christians (3.52).

3.52 opposite

Anonymous left
Untitled [Coloring book page with Adult Soldier, with additions by Darger]
Henry Darger right
Untitled [Tracing copy of this page, reworked as an adult Glandelinian].
Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photographs by Gavin Ashworth.



Forward, march





3.53

Henry Darger

Untitled [Photographic enlargement of Little Annie Rooney cartoon, drawn by Darrell McClure and written by Brandon Walsh]. This photographic enlargement was ordered by Darger on August 9, 1948. It was hand colored by technicians at the Kodak labs, Chicago, and mounted on cardboard by Darger. 7 3/4 x 7 5/8 in. Drawing ©1948 King Features Syndicate. Photographic enlargement ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.54

Darrell McClure

Untitled [Little Annie Rooney and her teddy bear]. Panel from the comic strip, reproduced by permission of King Features Syndicate.

It is by no means easy to imagine how Darger arrived at the idea of controlling the size of his images through photographic processes of enlargement. A major factor preventing him from considering this possibility was the high cost of obtaining negatives and enlargements. Given his very small salary, it is evident that, from 1944 on, all of his earnings not used for living expenses were being used to pay for photographic prints.⁶⁸ It was never possible for him to make more than a few prints each year.

The origin of the idea of employing photographic enlargement may not have occurred in the context of his large drawings, since the very first enlargements made were not used for this purpose. He appears to have begun to use enlarged images as a means of obtaining large-scale versions of favorite pictures to hang in his room. A marvelous example is seen in illustration 3.53. Perhaps because of its deeply moving content, Darger was evidently attracted to this panel from the "Little Annie Rooney" comic strip, which accurately expressed his own situation for much of his life.⁶⁹ On August 9, 1948, he ordered an 8 x 8 inch enlargement. The original panel was drawn in black line. On the envelope Darger's instructions to the Kodak lab are preserved. "Make as large as you can and color." It comes as a surprise to realize that the print was colored, not by Darger, but by the lab technician who, provided with a black-and-white original, had to invent suitable colors to satisfy his eccentric customer. Darger then mounted the hand-colored print on cardboard, so that it could be hung on the wall of his room. This was also the case with a number of enlarged pictures of clouds, which he had made and professionally colored

in 1944. These 11 x 14 inch cloud images were, in fact, the very first enlarged prints he ordered. Made as decorations for his room, they may never have been used as source material for pictures.

By 1945, however, he was regularly ordering images from the "Little Annie Rooney" comic strip. These dated negatives and the associated prints provide clear evidence of the enormous importance of this strip as an early model inspiring the illustrations for *The Realms*. It is probably not excessive to say that the onset of Darger's mature style was influenced primarily by two factors: the possibility of obtaining photographic enlargements, combined with the inspiration provided by the illustrated story of Little Annie Rooney. That it was possible to "blow up" the panels from that strip, some of which are less than an inch square, to an 11 x 14 inch format, probably gave Darger the courage to proceed with the illustration of his story. If we rely on the dated envelopes only, and it is likely that in the early years all of the envelopes would have been dated, it would seem that the "Little Annie Rooney" strip originally provided the only models used by Darger. In 1945 and 1946, all of the enlargements which he ordered were panels from this strip.

Then, in 1947, Darger seems to have realized that other sources of images of children could also be enlarged and incorporated into his work. He began to order 11 x 14 inch prints made from newspapers and magazines: photographs, advertisements, painted illustrations, children's fashion drawings, coloring-book drawings, as well as additional panels from the "Annie Rooney" strip (3.54). While Annie continued to be very important, particularly

3.55

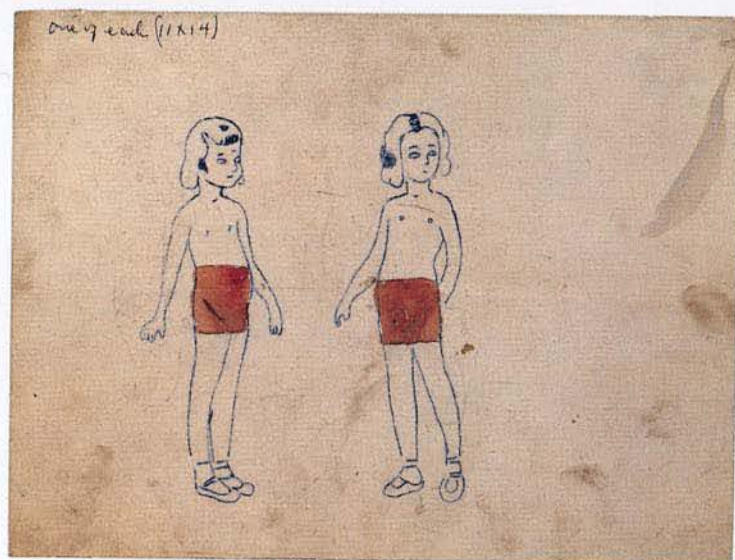
Henry Darger

Untitled [Back to nature play. London Day Nursery]. Photographic enlargement of a newspaper photograph. 8 1/4 x 14 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.56

Henry Darger

Untitled [Two Little Girls]. Carbon tracing with additional modifications by Darger including pink pants. Inscribed "one of each 11 x 14." Found in processing envelope dated September 8, 1950. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



in 1948, a wide range of popular material was now incorporated through photographic processes into Darger's art. This continued to be the case until 1959, when he ceased having photographic enlargements made.⁷⁰

THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT that Darger's drug-store orders would have been seen by the clerks and by the technicians at the Kodak labs as unusual, not to say perverse. In a period in America characterized by censorship and moral hypocrisy, his interest in drawings and photographs of little girls would have attracted attention and possibly disapproval. Darger himself seems to have known that images involving the depiction of naked children were unacceptable, though in the absence of genitals, they could be printed (3.55). There is no example, however, of an image modified by Darger (by the elimination of clothes, or the addition of male genitals) being submitted to the lab. Clearly he understood that this would be unacceptable (not because of the unusual genitals, but because of the explicit nudity), and he avoided trouble.

On one occasion he submitted one of his own drawings (a carbon tracing of two little girls) to the lab for enlarging (3.56). Both children were depicted in the tracing without clothes. Study of the drawing's surface (and of two additional drawings on the opposite side of the sheet) reveals that he has erased the male genitals. He then painted little red bathing suits on each of the children to be photographed, before sending them to the lab, an interesting testimony to his sense of reality. One wonders whether some unpleasant incident may have rendered him acutely conscious of limits beyond which it was not safe to go.

As a result of this self-imposed limitation, modification of images tended to occur after prints were returned from the lab. It was now the enlarged print which he tended to modify. Here again, a wonderful source of information about, and insight into, Darger's creative process is preserved. In tracing the enlarged image, he drew it as he desired it to be. This frequently involved the elimination of clothing, as well as the careful reconstruction of those parts of the body concealed beneath the clothing. It also involved the addition of anatomical detail: nipples, navel, and occasionally male genitals.⁷¹ He used a sharp stylus to trace the lines through the heavy photographic paper and the carbon, and onto the final paper surface. As a result, if the photograph is held at an angle to the light, it is possible to see all of the tracing lines, as well as any modification which Darger has introduced.⁷² Frequently, the carbon paper which he used for the transfer process left a ghostly image of the new drawing on the back of the photographic print. In many cases, therefore, we have both the original image on one side, and Darger's transformed image on the other. These strongly contrasting images, one the work of a professional artist, much enlarged, the other a tracing by Henry, provide a rich source of insight into the nature of his vision. These modified images lead us to the very heart of his mature collage-drawing style.

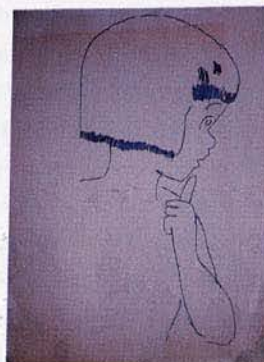
In enlarging pictures which were frequently very small, Darger obtained images of unusual simplicity and clarity (3.57). His tracing copies are generally simpler still. Often he retained nothing more than the basic contour lines, eliminating details which imply a subject or an environment failing to accord with *The Realms*. Only in his handling of hair do we detect an obsessional quality, with heavy shading used to transfer dark pigment from his carbon paper to the page beneath. While still unmistakably Little Annie Rooney, Darger's nude version has taken on new qualities of innocence and vulnerability. At times, the simplified tracing, its lines reduced to a bare minimum, becomes almost abstract, a sign rather than a reality (3.58). Darger's various modes of modifying tracing drawings, and of rendering them with his unique and very personal contour line, served to transform the most disparate images into immediately recognizable Darger drawings.



3.57



All that remained was for his imagination to carry these figures into new situations, new relationships, a new pictorial reality. But implicit in this adoptive procedure was a powerful force at work, creative and sexual, but also aggressive and sadistic. We must bear in mind that, at least in part, *The Realms* is a world of child slaves who can be moved about, exploited, tortured, or even killed. Darger's manipulation of images is no less forceful and ruthless; everything yields to his overwhelmingly powerful vision, every image submits to his devouring fantasy. The existential reality into which these once innocent images were being transferred was invariably more intense, disturbing, even terrifying, than the one they came from. In the act of tracing even the simplest image, Darger unconsciously embodied this shift in mood, moving from a major into a minor key, from the simple world of childhood into the darker more uncertain and unsettling other realm in which he lived. Let's follow some of the little girls into the new reality of the collage-drawings.



3.58



3.59



Darger manipulated his images in every possible way, utilizing all the aspects of the processes of enlargement, tracing, and duplication available to him (3.59). He occasionally had more than one size of enlargement made, or ordered different parts of an image isolated and enlarged. He repeatedly traced the same pictures, changing the image in various ways, so as to remove a single figure, or in order to obtain a clothed and unclothed version of the same figure. He took particular delight in fabric patterns, especially polka dots, and carefully traced these into his transfer drawings. He also enjoyed incorporating multiple versions of the same figure in a single work, often deriving all seven of the Vivian girls from a single model: for example, this picture of a little girl sitting on a fence (3.60, 3.61). The resulting image lifts us with unexpected suddenness into an entirely new and strangely unsettling world (6.1).

3.57

Henry Darger
Untitled [Little Annie Rooney]. Photographic enlargement of Little Annie Rooney cartoon, drawn by Darrell McClure and written by Brandon Walsh. 13 x 11 inch enlarged print made from a 1 inch original panel, dated by processing envelope to September 21, 1949.
Henry Darger
Carbon tracing on the reverse of enlarged print.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.58

Henry Darger
Untitled [Tracing drawing of Little Annie Rooney]. Manila paper with blue carbon. 11 3/4 x 9 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.59

Anonymous
Untitled [Little girl bent over]. Original coloring book illustration.
Henry Darger
Untitled [Little girl bent over]. Tracing copy of photographic enlargement, dated June 22, 1952. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.60

Anonymous

Untitled [Girl and boy on a fence]. Original page and photographic enlargement (11 x 14 in.), as well as additional smaller photographic details of this magazine illustration, ordered by Darger. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.61

Henry Darger

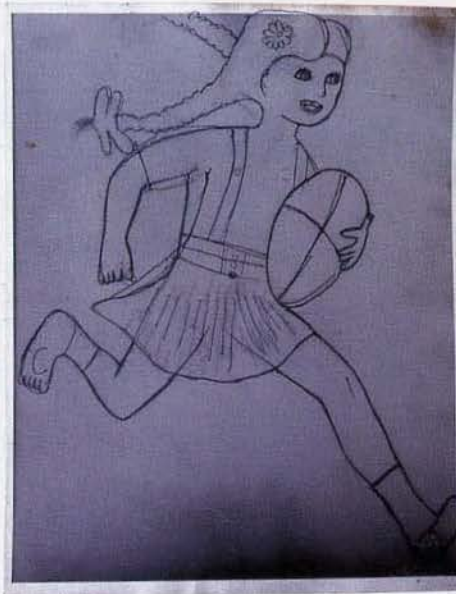
Untitled [Little girl on a fence]. Copy drawing in blue carbon and an additional tracing. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



3.60

3.61

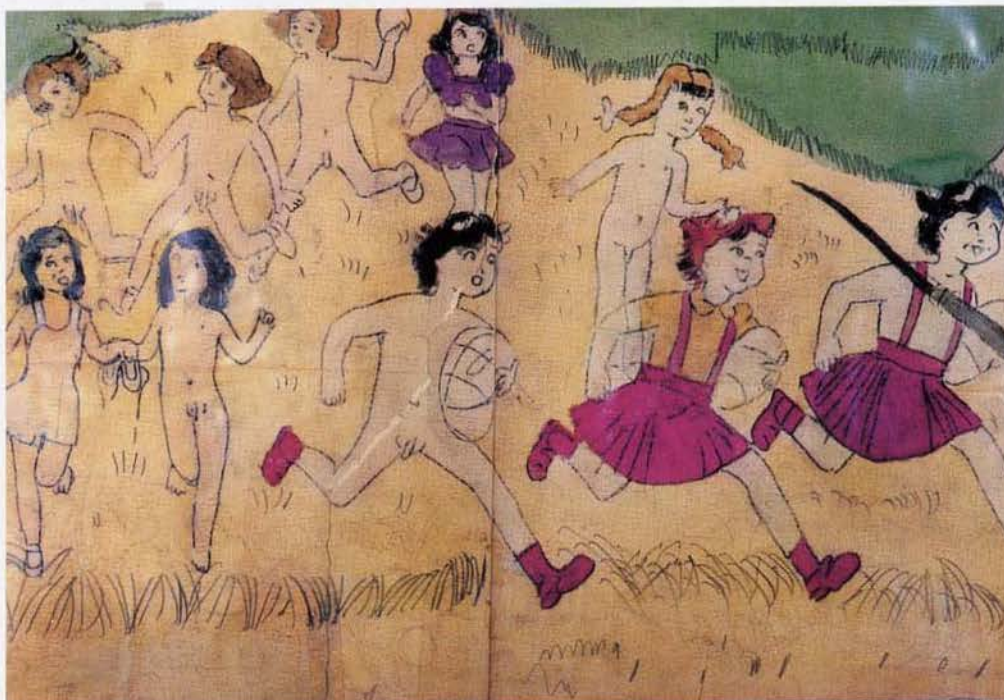
Darger's children are constantly fleeing from situations of danger. In order to depict their flight, he collected images, as we have seen, of little girls running. In illustration 3.62, an enlargement of a smaller drawing, the transition to Darger's realm has already begun. His frightened children are seldom alone, their experience of terror and flight is almost invariably a shared experience. This is particularly the case with the Vivian sisters, who appear as multiples of each other, or as mirror images. They are usually blonde and clothed in matching outfits, while the child slaves, the victims of evil adults, are almost invariably naked. In the process of making a tracing copy, the children's clothing can be removed. In the waxpaper tracing (3.63), the running figure is preserved in its original size and orientation, but is dramatically altered. Stripped and isolated, she seems terrifyingly frail and vulnerable. By using the image both in its original orientation and reversed, Darger is able to suggest greater randomness and confusion, even panic (3.64). The presence of male genitals on the little girls complicates any attempt at an explanation of what is happening, with the children's flight inevitably taking on sexual implications and the threat of castration.⁷³ This danger is immeasurably enhanced when clothed adults enter the picture, often in pursuit of the children (3.65).



3.62



3.63



3.64

3.62

Henry Darger

Untitled [Girl running with package under her arm]. Tracing drawing photographically enlarged to 11 x 14 inch print, 1948. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.63

Henry Darger

Untitled [Naked little girl running with a ball]. Waxed-paper tracing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.64

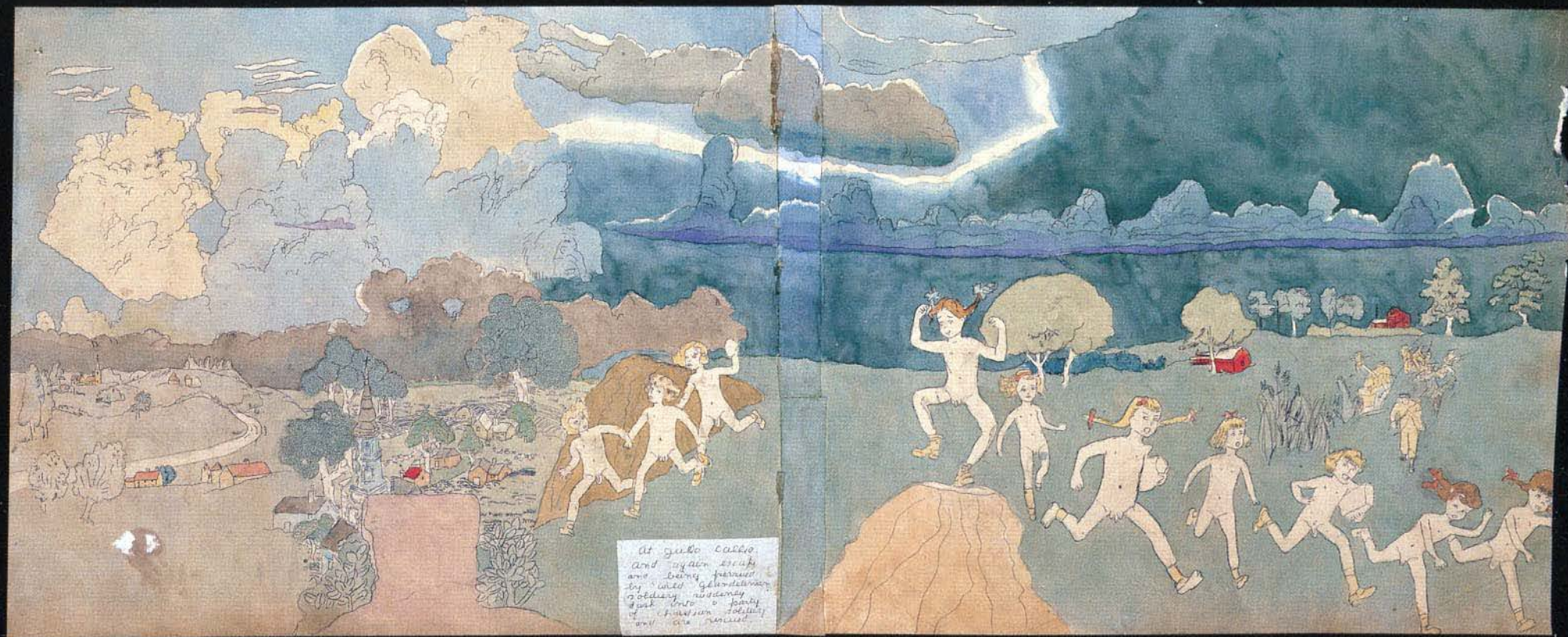
Henry Darger

Untitled [Little girls, with and without clothing, running]. Detail. Collage Drawing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.65 right

Henry Darger

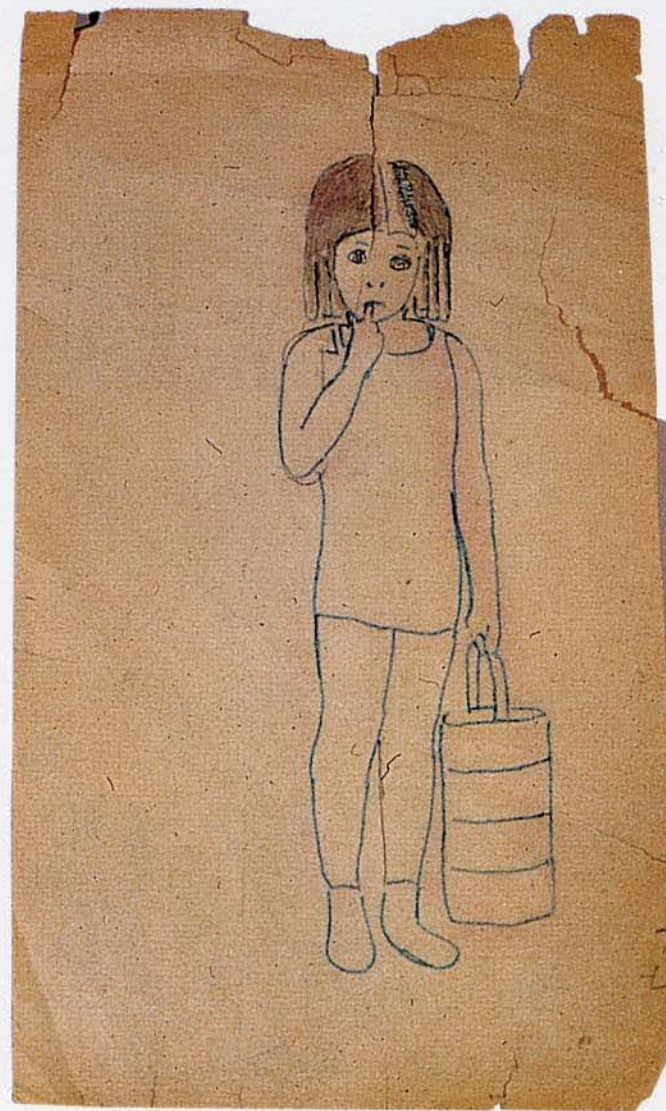
At Jullo Callio. And again escape and being pursued by wild Glandelinian soldiery suddenly dash into a party of christian soldiery and are rescued. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 19 x 47 3/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



At Guabo Cacho
and again escape
and being pursued
by wild guerrillas
soldiers, and a party
of American soldiers
and are rescued.

Another image which Darger loved and employed repeatedly is the little girl with a pail (3.66). He was attracted to this image because of the shy, slightly fearful and withdrawn, gesture of the child tentatively bringing her finger to her mouth. Many versions of the drawing survive in his room. In the original drawing, from which all the variants stem, she was undoubtedly clothed. This was certainly the case with the version of the drawing which he sent to the lab to be enlarged, on March 1, 1949 (3.67). As soon as he had the print in his hands, the process of modification began. Evidence of these changes is to be seen on the front face of the enlarged print, where he twice attempted to insert male genitals, one version below the other. His finished copy appears on the reverse, where the child is completely naked and equipped with penis and testicles. At each stage in the transformation, she can be seen to enter more deeply into Darger's sexual fantasies. Whatever her origin may have been, she was now part of his inner world. She becomes unmistakably his little girl, shy, vulnerable, helpless, and alone. In his fantasy he can do with her what he will. In the case of images he specially cared for, he invented all kinds of unexpected modifications. Tracings of body parts, arms, legs, etc., survive, demonstrating that he was able to modify figures, changing their positions and gestures (3.68).

Transported into the new world of the collage-drawings, the little girl with a pail retains much of her identity and her aloneness (see 11.1). Unlike the other children, she doesn't run. Even they seem to realize that she is destined to be a victim, unable or unwilling to flee. In groups of children, this lost little soul appears curiously isolated and alone.



3.66 left
Henry Darger
Untitled [Little girl with a pail]. Tracing drawing in blue carbon on Manila paper, hair shaded in black pencil. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.67 opposite, left and center
Henry Darger
Untitled [Little girl with a pail].
Left: Photographic enlargement dated March 1, 1949. 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
Center: Tracing copy, reverse of the photographic enlargement.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

3.68 opposite, right
Henry Darger
Untitled [Naked little girl with a pail in the air]. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Naked, always carrying her pail, she is unmistakably a child slave. In *The Realms* these children are unable to resist the violence of adults; witnesses of the torments of others, they passively wait their turn (see 6.5). In details such as this, we see the fearful intensity of Darger's vision: the creative power, the terrible desire, and the pain.⁷⁴

WE HAVE ATTEMPTED in this chapter to arrive at an understanding of the deeply unconventional, indeed bizarrely personal motivations and means by which Darger arrived at the invention of the collage-drawing. It is certain that these pictorial assemblages can never have, for us, the meaning they possessed for him. His goal was not the creation of a narrative and pictorial art form, but the elaboration of an alternate world in which he and his little friends might live. What we see as "borrowed images," he saw as his children. The whole of Darger's work can be seen as representing a tentative step out beyond the psychological realm of the dream and internal fantasy, with borrowed images carrying him just over the edge into the tenuous materiality of art. His work appeals to us, in part, because it is both dreamlike and curiously mundane.

Examination of the surface of any of the collage-drawings reveals that almost every image assembled in these large compositions, figures (both children and adults), buildings, animals, flowers, clouds, etc., has been borrowed from another source, and incorporated into these colored drawings by tracing. On occasion, as well, actual collage fragments have been cut out and pasted onto the drawing surface. Dozens, sometimes hundreds, of separate images have been brought together by these various methods. Darger's genius resided in

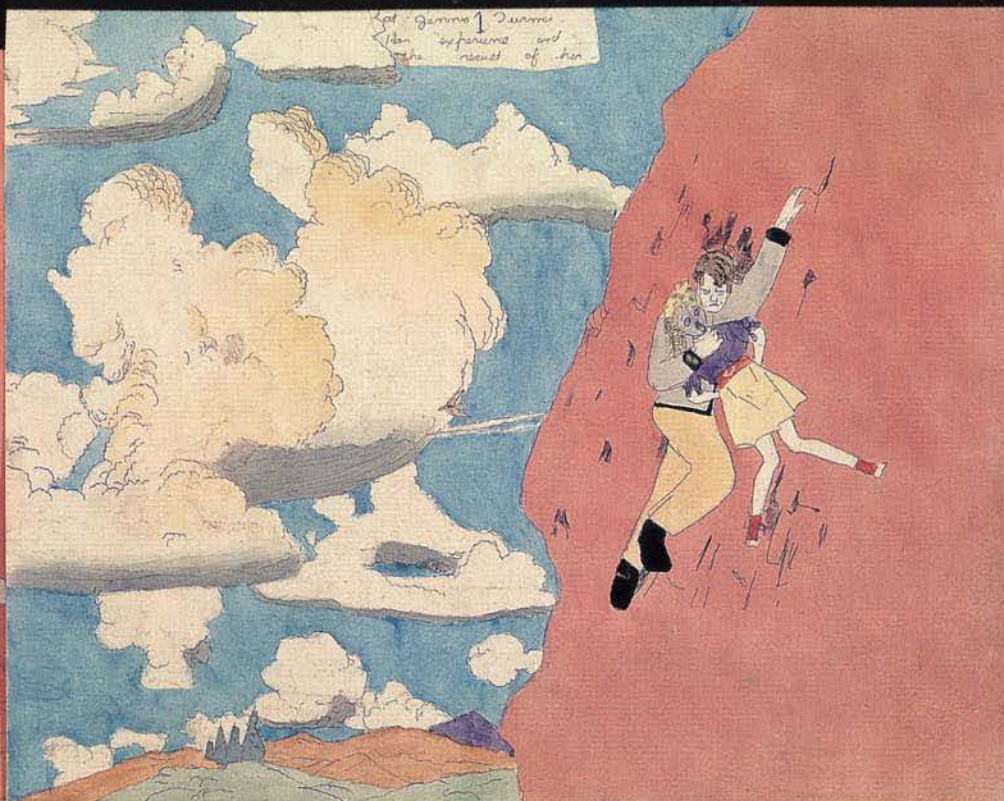
his unique ability to compose the visual field: to arrange figures, to create space, and to manipulate colored washes so as to imbue his pictures with intense emotion and to tell a story.

In many of the pictures, enormously enlarged details (usually parts of a figure) are shown cut off by the frame, or by the edge of the composition. Through the use of this photographic technique, probably derived in Darger's case from comic books, he implied that his world extended out beyond the limited reality of the picture. In drawings of architectural interiors, he often played with the multiple reality of the picture within a picture. The brief, handwritten texts which appear as titles and captions on the picture surface also hint at the existence of a story and of events not seen in the picture. Through these devices, we are also reminded that these colored images are illustrations, not independent works of art, and that their significance resides in the subtle interaction of text and picture. Almost all of the collage-drawings were intended to depict specific moments in the narrative. Even those illustrations of more generic type, which can be fitted into *The Realms* at many different places, were probably executed by the artist with a specific reference in mind. For this reason, more detailed examination of the mature collage-drawings will be carried out in later chapters devoted to the systematic study of aspects of *The Realms* as both written and pictorial narrative. Nevertheless, a few additional observations concerning the origin and meaning of the collage-drawings are in order.

3.69

Henry Darger

At Jennie Turner. Desperate struggles for air when he strangled her. She fell with him hundreds of feet but landed on top on him and only he was killed. 2000 feet below where they were first [left panel]; *At Jennie Turner. His Experience and the Result of her* [right panel]. Collage-drawing. Collection Robert M. Greenberg, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.





3.70

Henry Darger

Untitled [Ornate interior with multiple figures of girls and blengins]. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper. 22 x 96 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©Kiyoko Lerner.

The idea of assembling a large and complex pictorial composition, making use of pre-existing figures brought together and arranged to make an entirely new whole, represents a familiar tradition of picture-making in the history of art. Many of the techniques and compositional devices used by Darger were already familiar to the tomb painters of Ancient Egypt.⁷⁵ Reliance on "collections" or pattern books, containing standard figure types, and the transfer of images through the use of traced "cartoons," was a standard procedure during much of the history of Western art.⁷⁶ Unencumbered by exaggerated demands for originality, earlier artist/illustrators felt free to borrow and to adapt figures or details as needed.

In Darger's case, it is doubtful that he felt any need to conceal his sources or the extent of his borrowing. We have to bear in mind the simple fact that there was very little possibility that his pictures would ever be seen, a fact of which he was well aware. Perhaps, as in his writings, he had an imaginary audience in mind, but no such viewer ever materialized in his lifetime. The pictures were made exclusively to satisfy his own need.

In the absence of art training, he was often forced to invent his own solutions to problems for which solutions had long existed. As I have attempted to demonstrate, Darger arrived often at traditional means of pictorial construction via utterly unconventional and personal routes, which essentially had nothing to do with the making of works of art. There is not the slightest reason to believe that he was familiar with the history of art, or with any aspect of Western culture in its more sophisticated manifestations. In terms of the culture of his time, he can be seen as an artistic naïve.

By protecting him from conventional solutions and visual clichés, this naiveté encouraged him, for example, in the discovery and manipulation of unconventional means of constructing pictorial space. Having distributed his figures on the picture field, with extraordinary inventiveness, he proceeded to devise wonderfully innovative and ambiguous settings for them to exist in. Aware of how to use overlap and relative size to suggest depth, he seemingly reveled in irrational and disturbing space construction (3.69).

A brilliant natural colorist, he created endless unexpected chords and harmonies as a means of embodying his other and unreal world. Although his love of the natural world occasionally influenced his choice of colors, he was aware of the possibilities of using color to surprise and amaze, exploiting yellows, pinks, and violets with extraordinary élan (3.70). A delightful passage in *The Realms* betrays his delight in shocking colors.

Violet thought the effect of her fall must have made her see things. In the east it looked as if there were six great glowing balls suspended in the air. The central and largest ones were white, and reminded her of the sun shining below the dense smoky sky. Around it were arranged like the five points of a star, the other twenty brilliant balls being all the colors of the artistic paints except black and brown. These splendid groups of colored round lights were not stationary to her eyes however, but floated and sent rays darting in every direction, and the rays began to take on all the delicate tintings of the rainbow, growing more and more distinct every moment as they came nearer until,

to her surprised and startled eyes, all the space was brilliantly illuminated. She was frightened at first, thinking maybe she had gone insane from her shock, but it was not so, those lights were actually there. Violet, however, was too dazed to say much (they were star shell lights), but she watched Penrod's ears turned to a sort of violet, and the other side of his face to rose, and wondered that the soldiers working to draw up the horses should almost turn yellow, and the others and the horses striped with blue and orange like the stripes of a zebra. Then she looked at Zeb, whose face was blue, and whose hair was for a second pink, and gave a little laugh, that sounded a bit nervous. "Is it not strange and funny?" she said. The boy scout was startled, and his eyes were big. Violet had a green streak through the center of her pretty little face where the blue and yellow lights came together, and her appearance seemed to add to his fright.⁷⁷

Despite his lack of formal training, Darger achieved uncommon mastery in the use of watercolor and in the manipulation of colored washes. It is through these controlled fields of color that the disparate elements comprising his drawing are finally brought together in a new and convincing unity; and it is through the startling originality and beauty of his color that the unreality of *The Realms* is most clearly achieved.

DARGER'S DREAMLIKE ART, like all dreams, is dependent upon the assemblage and manipulation of images derived from elsewhere. One has a very intense impression, in looking at his art, of encountering the pictorial world of dreams, with mundane and familiar images juxtaposed in profoundly unsettling, indeed surreal, situations. While excluding borrowings from "high art" almost entirely, the collage-drawings incorporate a vast range of popular imagery borrowed from all kinds of pictorial sources. Because his "other world" is permeated by the reality of the everyday, his pictures look oddly familiar. We can't quite place where we have seen them. Only rarely do we spot a detail whose original source in comic strip illustrations, Civil War pictures, or old news photographs, we recognize with a momentary shock. As in dreams, there is that odd mixture of the familiar and the exceeding strange which, coming together in irrational and unexpected juxtapositions, is able to embody obscure but deeply significant personal meanings.

Throughout his life Darger was remarkably attentive to various aspects of the popular culture of America, particularly its pictorial manifestations. Perhaps most important for his art was his lifelong involvement with comic strip illustrations.⁷⁸ Without being conscious of what he was doing, he created an art form, the collage-drawing, which in its obvious exploitation and manipulation of popular visual culture, anticipated many aspects of Pop Art.⁷⁹ His work represents a superb example of the way in which the spiritual and aesthetic preoccupations of an age enter unconsciously into every artistic manifestation, even those occurring "naturally," free of any conscious awareness of evolving developments in art. The powerful synthesis which Darger achieved in the collage-drawings, the adoption of lost images from so many undervalued and transitory sources, and the creation of a vast mythological structure to contain them, was arrived at through a curious and lifelong state of spiritual and artistic innocence. It is to the examination of that inner state, Darger's other existence *In the Realms of the Unreal*, that we now turn.

3.71

Henry Darger

150 At Jennie Richee. Racing through a field of gigantic flowers to seek shelter as the storm renews.

Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper. 60 x 276 cm.

Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. Inv. 9446 (recto). ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



4



"It's a big war, bigger than the world itself knows, my friend," Violet Vivian herself would say.¹

The Christian soul is always imagining battles within itself.

—André Gide²

EVIL UNLEASHED: A World at War

Dreadful is the results always that follows the clashing of two mighty armies. Rack and ruin and terrible slaughter and disasters terrible attend their meeting, and always one or the other army is rent asunder in their might. It is to the fury of the christian and Glandelinian armies against each other that such battles and disasters of the war are due and when these demons are opposing one another in wild battle everything is dreadful and thrilling to behold. Then the terror comes, then it seems before the dreadful cannon fire that the earth trembles to its heart, shells rent the landscape to ruin, then the ashes of a terrible spent burning fire are

what is left of flourishing cities, then terrific explosions bombard the air, and two long lines of contending armies of men crash at each other, and all human hopes, and the results of man[s] labor are welmed alike beneath the dread torrents of death and dismay ... Concussions, and famine, disease, and pestilence, woe throughout nations, fire and terrible loss of life — these are the destroyers that all people fear when they come singly, how much worse is it when they all come together as they do in a terrible war, as they now do in this terrible long catastrophe.

—Henry Darger³

Throughout all of recorded history, mankind has engaged in warfare, with the two World Wars of the twentieth century unique only in respect of their destructiveness and extent. While explanations without number are offered concerning the causes of war, it is probable that the tendency to make war is psychologically, perhaps even genetically, innate in man.⁴ Not uncommonly, the onset of a war is welcomed with joy and enthusiasm, and successful wars have been celebrated, in retrospect, in history, literature, art, and song. In war death loses much of its terrible significance; with the obliteration of thousands of young lives coldly represented as mere battlefield statistics, or concealed behind alphabetical lists of names. The need to unite in a group manifestation of aggression is so characteristic of our species that only the newly emergent threat of universal cataclysm has led a few thoughtful individuals to examine the powerful irrational factors which underlie this all but irresistible human drive. Most wars have their origins in a host of complex issues which reflect long traditions of enmity between political, national, religious, or racial groupings, but it is not unknown for the onset of a war to be attributable to the decision of a single, well-placed individual, an expression, at least in part, of his personal need to make war. In such relatively rare situations it is natural to inquire into the internal psychological or psychopathological mechanisms which might bring about the need for war in an individual.⁵

An inquiry into individual psychology becomes even more necessary when the war in question is purely imaginary; when internal factors in a single mind have given birth to a long, complex, and exceedingly violent, imaginary war. This chapter is, accordingly, devoted to a detailed examination of Henry Darger's historical invention, the Glandco-Angelinian war.⁶ Given his lack of any personal experience of war, it is essential to obtain some insight into the sources and factors which shaped Darger's essentially fantastic conception of warfare. What need in him necessitated this private war? What was the nature of the conflict emerging from his mind? What is the character of the contrasting combatants, and to what extent is Henry present on both sides of the violent struggle? What function did obsessive writing about war, and later pictorial illustration of it, play in his life? Does his vision of war and his description of battle evolve over the years? Detailed examination of the full extent of Darger's overwhelming need to externalize aggression in symbolic form is reserved for later chapters; we will begin here to investigate his compulsive and unconscious need to project internal mental structures and forms (existent only in the psyche) into an imaginary and ongoing external conflict. Focusing on the phenomenology of war in *The Realms* we will attempt to establish parallels between the obscure workings of his mind and his dark and complex vision of a war-torn world in chaos.

While the short title suggested by Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, serves to locate his narrative in the seemingly safe context of fantasy, the full title used in the first volume, THE STORY OF THE VIVIAN GIRLS IN WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE REALMS OF THE UNREAL, OF THE GLANDECO-ANGELINIAN WAR STORM CAUSED BY THE CHILD SLAVE REBELLION, is more precise, both in identifying the child heroines of his story, and in placing them at once amidst the turmoil of war. As the subtitle indicates, war is to be a major theme of this gigantic work, with the adventures of children and child slaves depicted against the somber and omnipresent conflict.

When, in the course of the story itself, the many volumes of Darger's great book are found by the Vivian girls, Jack Evans, examining them, describes the work as "a good history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war"; and this was certainly what Henry understood his opus to be.⁷ To a certain extent we view the war through the eyes of the child participants whose child-slave uprising is its cause. Although various chapters and even entire volumes are devoted to other, no less significant, subjects, the war persists unresolved through all fifteen volumes, with success in battle shifting irrationally from side to side, reaching a final resolution only in the last pages of the final volume.⁸ Yet this vast conflict, with its thousands of battles and billions of deaths and casualties, lasts, according to Darger, only four years and seven months. Huge set-piece battles, each covering dozens of pages, occur with absolute regularity, seemingly in obedience to internal necessity, perhaps reflecting a kind of cyclical or rhythmic return of characteristic and troubling mental states in the author.

Darger as Historian

On the simplest level, Darger wanted to write history, the history of a civil war. His notion of history and of historical writing was a conventional one, in that he saw the historian's task simply as documenting the course of war. However, by locating his historical events in the Realms of the Unreal, he immediately involves us in paradox, since for most of us history involves the bringing together and the analysis of more or less objective facts, and imagination and pure invention are reserved for the elaboration of fiction. Examined from outside, *In the Realms of the Unreal* appears to be a vast literary enterprise, an impossibly large novel, with war as one of its major themes. From this point of view, Darger's insistence on interrupting the flow of the narrative to describe set-piece battles in laborious detail, often for a hundred pages or more, can be seen as a flaw in the work. These innumerable accounts of battle, though dazzlingly inventive, are admittedly terribly difficult to read; and the endless series of separate battles, each with one or more complex names, is absolutely impossible to keep track of.⁹ Were he a writer of conventional fiction, Darger would certainly be open to criticism.

However, looked at from the vantage point of his internal experience, and the unique manner of writing he developed, this vast accumulation of detailed description seems to have functioned as history rather than fiction for its author, documenting an ongoing sequence of events occurring in a subjective, but profoundly real, inner world. While he consistently emphasized the unreality of the world of which he was writing, he functioned within it as historian rather than novelist or storyteller — though at one time or another he lays claim to each of these identities and many more as well. In a very real way it becomes clear that Darger writes from within the war: communicating in journalistic style from the field of battle, describing dramatic sensory events actually occurring around him with hallucinatory intensity.

The author writes the scenes in this volume as if he often had experienced them himself, as if at one time he is on the side of the foe, at other on that of the christians, then again he is with Penrod and his friends, or with Violet and her sisters, or with the christian generals. Sometimes he writes as if he was actually one of the surviving victims of either flood, fire, or explosion disaster, or fights in battles for one side or another.¹⁰

Psychological forces and internal events and feelings do possess psychic reality. Their projection as external images can entail a risk of their being confused with objectively perceived sensory data. In this sense Darger was truly writing history — his own.

The Frightful Battle of Evangeline Run

General [Hanson] Vivian had gathered an immense army and moved forward toward Evangeline Run 30 miles away ... And so, on this very ground and along this small river, on both banks, he threw up hasty but strong positions, and then formed battle lines to meet [general] Leonard's attacks which he knew would soon come.

Before he started any engagement with Governor General Vivian, the Glandelinian Leader McHollister Leonard telegraphed to the King at the Capital. "I shall attack the Angelinians tomorrow. If they still stand to fight, or if they retreat during the night, I shall pursue them, throwing heavy cavarly in his rear to destroy his trains if possible."

But, Governor General Vivian was not yet ready to give up the coming struggle. Under cover of the night he shifted his position so that the morning came, and when the Glandelinians advanced, they only found skirmishers in his front which were quickly driven in. General Vivian's new line was about 40 miles in length, and had been slowly but strongly entrenched with abatis thrown up in front. Part of the christian army formed an angle extending part way across the Evangeline Run, and when the main attack began, both opposing armies were about 1000 yards apart, very close indeed for armies of such great size!

The Glandelinian advance was open to the observation of the many Angelinian commanders who hurried forward great numbers to meet the attack. The assault was made by 1,500,000 Glandelinians, and received by the Angelinians with a tremendous fire of grape, canister shells, and musketry. The furious Glandelinians moved forward steadily until within 100 yards of the works, when the Angelinians arose and poured into the assaulting lines their whole length a most destructive fire, tearing the whole line to fragments and causing the survivors to waver, and then to fall back, leaving their dead and wounded indiscriminately mixed and mingled, lying amid the abatis, the gallant Glandelinian General, Francis Auction, among the wounded.

In the furious enthusiasm following this temporary success, General Vivian decided that the day was won. But his prophesies were doomed to refutation. When General Leonard, and his aiding officer, General Leonard Frander, learned that a portion of the christian line under General Brotherline Francisanna had been weakened, and failed to support the main lines thus attacked, they again pushed forward with terrible fury, and after a frightful struggle that raged with all its violence, carried all before them, irreparably breaking the christian line asunder under Brotherline in a dozen places, and capturing all his artillery and 10,000 prisoners.

General Hacker Confed, with a large force of cavarly and infantry, made a simultaneous attack on General Brotherline's rear, falling on the flank of the christian force, and cutting them off from the little Evangeline Run river. By this time, Brotherline's army, driven as no other army has been driven before, and with only a remnant of artillery, and abandoned its guns, flung away its muskets and everything that might impede its flight, and scattered in hopeless confusion through the large plane.¹¹

Darger's conception of war was derived, for the most part, from his knowledge of the American Revolutionary War (1775-83) and the later Civil War (1861-65). The war being fought in *The Realms* involves a prolonged dispute between a group of once united states which together formed a single region or planet. The cause of this civil war is a conflict centering on the use of slaves, in this case child slaves as opposed to imported slaves distinguished by their color. As a boy still in elementary school, Darger was, as we know, uniquely interested in American history, and particularly in accounts of the Civil War. He attained a surprising degree of intellectual independence, both from his teacher, Mrs. Dewey, and from books, in terms of his discovery of inconsistencies and errors in the recording of historical fact.¹² The incident, proudly described by Henry in his autobiography, in which he confronted his teacher with the varying statistics presented in different history books concerning the number of participants and casualties in the various battles of the Civil War, may have played a

crucial part in shaping his identity.¹³ It was certainly not an accident that this event lingered in his mind throughout his life, since it served to demonstrate not only his unusual intelligence, at a time when his intelligence was being called radically into question, but may also have contributed to his self-image, at least in fantasy, as a historian. His knowledge of the War between the States is woven skillfully into the story, with individual characters in *The Realms* clearly cognizant of American history.

I'm beaten, I'll have to admit it, but just the same I do not lose heart. I remember the stories of the many battles during the Civil war in the United States, in Eighteen Sixty One when many times the cause of the Nationals were just as much at stake as our own now, and how did the whole quarrel turn out? Why the Confederates were finally reduced to the last stages of desperation, and general Robert Edmund Lee had to surrender to save his armies from destruction and the Southern States from further devastation. We cannot be like the Confederates who were beaten through their own fault, and neither will we allow ourselves to be beaten. We can win, and there is something wrong somewhere that causes the victory that the enemy continually wins.¹⁴

There was another classroom event which linked Henry and the Civil War, his discovery that he was born on the day usually selected by historians as representing the official start of the war. On that day, April 12, 1861, the Confederate artillery attacked and forced the surrender of Fort Sumter. Henry would certainly have known that this event, occurring, to the day, thirty-one years before his birth, initiated hostilities between North and South. The discovery of this personal connection to the war undoubtedly meant a lot to Henry as a boy, contributing to his otherwise far from secure belief in his own importance, and establishing, by a curious coincidence, his intense interest in Civil War history. Had Darger's intellectual development followed a more ideal trajectory, he might well have developed his interest in objective historical research. However, his incarceration in an institution for feeble-minded children, which followed almost immediately upon his first experience of intellectual independence, obliterated any hope he might have had of a scholarly career, while making it impossible for him to continue his involvement with American history. In the asylum few serious books would have been available to him, and there was almost certainly no one there who could encourage his interest in the Civil War, or share his enthusiasm for history.

WHAT IS ASTONISHING, and far from easily explained, is the fact that Darger seems to have responded to the situation of extreme intellectual and educational deprivation in which he found himself by inventing his own civil war, locating it in an imaginary world of his own creation. In the

face of an unjust, indeed preposterous, clinical diagnosis, this fantasy history would seem to have formed part of a desperate personal effort on his part both to demonstrate his intelligence and to maintain his sense of self-worth.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, his invented war incorporates all sorts of place-names, characters, and historical features familiar to him from his study of American military history, fleshed out to an almost unimaginable extent with contributions from an astonishingly concrete and productive fantasy life. It is the veritable avalanche of factual information which brings Darger's prose accounts of battle so much closer in feeling to history than to fiction. The compulsive emphasis on the build-up of excessive sensory detail and of seemingly objective fact (the assembling of vastly inflated statistics, numbers of participants, precise lists of casualties, and financial losses in each battle), on the one hand, reflects a determined effort to assert the strength of his intellect, and, on the other hand, perhaps represents a slightly satirical playing about with battle statistics intended to ridicule the supposed objectivity of historians of war.

While it is impossible to prove conclusively that Darger's systematized fantasy activity originated primarily during his years of institutionalization, two factors make it seem probable. Conditions of extreme deprivation tend to provoke complex and ongoing fantasy formation, particularly in individuals of high intelligence.¹⁶ Significantly, some of Darger's later fantasy battles take place on the grounds of the Lincoln Asylum and on the asylum farm.

... the opposing forces did meet each other at Lincoln farm on January 12th in full sight of the hired hands and children working there, who were able for the first time in their lives to see a real battle ... In this battle on the Lincoln Farm in which the christians were victorious the Glandelinian forces suffered heavily in losses in soldiers' weapons and arms. Over three million Glandelinians and five million christians had fallen. The retreat continued for a long distance lasting four days, from the farm after having another severe action near the Lincoln Asylum in which they temporarily reversed against the christians but not without horrible losses.¹⁷

Then, we have to consider the literal explosion of creative activity which followed closely upon his escape from the Lincoln Asylum in 1909. That Darger was familiar with the complex world of *The Realms* right from the start would seem to support the view that he was writing a historical account of a world and a war he already knew well, embodying in written form elements from a narrative that may have existed for some time. Of course, the need for organized and evolving fantasy of this kind continued undiminished, with Darger adding to the vast historical structure that is his writing on a daily basis for the rest of his life.

Mapping the Realms

In creating an alternate world it is usual for the fantasizing individual to be obsessively exact concerning its location and its internal subdivisions. Even the more bizarre of these imaginative realms usually demands elaborate geographical structuring and, quite regularly, detailed maps.¹⁸ These spatial arrangements tend to reflect precise subjective psychic experience, distinct internal psychological states and boundaries, and, often, mental conflicts. It is of significance, therefore, that Darger's other world, the Realms of the Unreal, seems to lack firm geographical logic, and was never clearly circumscribed by an overall map documenting the basic subdivisions of the planet or territories, or establishing the internal relationships and experiences characteristic of his alternate world.

Initially Darger was quite precise about the location of the Realms and their relationship to our earth, but this science-fiction setting was soon forgotten and the attempt to establish firm distinctions between our world (reality) and the Realms (the unreal) was largely abandoned.

The Scenes of this story, as its title indicates, lies among the nations of an unknown or imaginary world, or countries, with our earth as their moon ... This imaginary planet is a thousand times as large as our own world.¹⁹

A group of nation states are soon introduced: Abbieannia, Angelinia, Calverinia, and the less important Protestantia, Concentinia, and Abysinkile, making up a group of interdependent Christian nations. Darger delighted in "naming," with the result that numerous additional nations come into

being in response to his limitless capacity to invent neologisms. In opposition to the Christian nations he describes the powerful rebel state of Glandelinia. "Next to Abbieannia Glandelinia is the most powerful of them all, and three-quarters of the population is as wicked as can be."²⁰ Joined, at an earlier time, to the Christian nations, Glandelinia and a group of allied rebel states have broken away over the issues of child slavery and exhibitionistic atheism. Vast bodies of water, oceans and seas, surround and occasionally separate these states. "The names of the oceans are the same as the names of the nations ... The largest body of water known as the Angelinian Seas could hold scores of our own worlds and still have room."²¹

Darger's geographical boundaries, including land masses and seas, are conceptually fluid and insecure, with their borders and shorelines shifting about irrationally as necessity demanded. It is impossible when reading *The Realms* to visualize firm geographical or spatial relationships. While Henry loved drawing maps, and often speaks of this activity in his writings, those that survive are limited to the depiction of small areas, and are used for the most part to establish the location of major battles, troop dispositions, or cities under siege (see illustration 8.5). He was more precise only in regard to groups of islands — the Boyking Islands, Blengiglomenean Islands, and the Catherine Isles — and these islands play no very significant part in the story. Perhaps his detailed knowledge of this part of the Realms of the Unreal was the result of his having been there.

"Oh, I know these seas," said Darger, "I've been myself at the Boyking Islands and Blengiglomenean Islands scores of times."²²

The one thing he insists on is the enormous size of the various nations, with each one vast both in terms of geographical extent and population. "The two nations Abbieannia and Glandelinia alone have in this story hundreds of trillions of men, and many trillions of women and children."²³

Good Guys and Bad: Adult Participants in The Realms

While Darger's concern with the geography of the unreal was limited, his preoccupation with its history was profound and unceasing. The principal theme of his book is the history of war in the Realms of the Unreal. While his descriptive task involved tracing the history of only one war, that of 1911–16, he indicated that that civil war is only the last of a series of wars fought by the same nations over the issue of child slavery. "Abbieannia made four [previous] attempts to break this evil in waging four wars with Glandelinia." He also mentions the wars of 1841, 1843, 1877, and 1899.²⁴ The final war of 1911–16 breaks out when Glandelinia invades the Christian state of Calverinia to put down the revolt of the child slaves. "The child slave conditions being at its worst at that time, brought on the frightful Glandco-Angelinian War of 1912 which was the most terrific of all ever observed."²⁵ The other Christian nations rush to aid the Calvinians, with the result that most of the fighting during the early part of the story occurs in unhappy Calverinia, which is reduced to rubble. In the final stages of the conflict, the war is carried by the Christian forces into Glandelinia itself, and the horrors of war are then visited upon those who were responsible for initiating it in the first place.

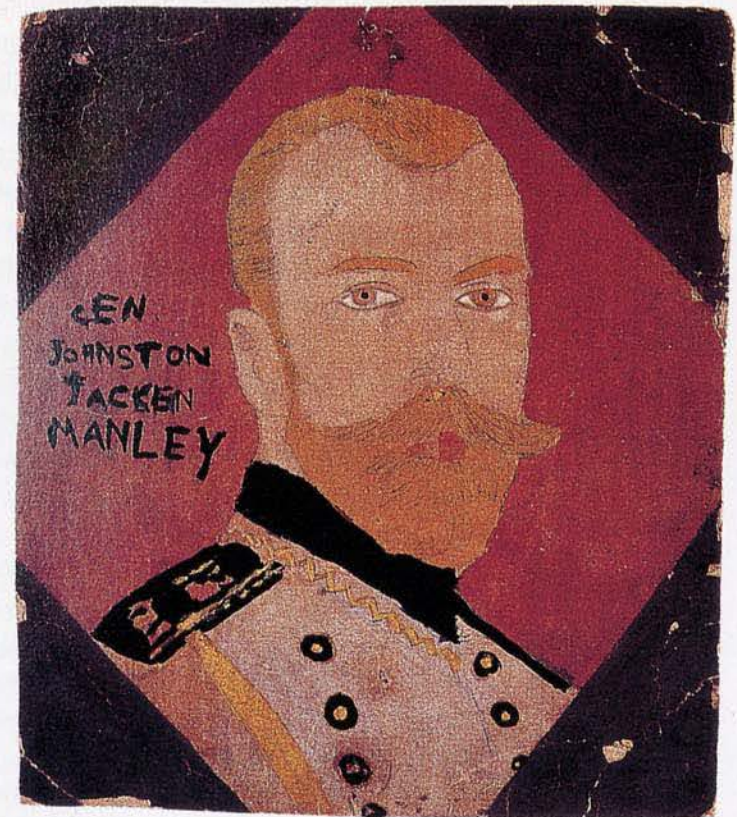
"When the Glandelinian reprobates plunged the whole Calverinian State into this devastating horror," said Penrod to Gertrude, "Emperor Vivian gave his word that he would redeem Calverinia from this desolation and with the help of God, crush Glandelinia. That he could and would provide all the armies necessary to do this, through which he would bring a like disaster upon Glandelinia in due time." "That seems kind of out of place ... Wayward Glandelinia would be forced to repent and return to her mother country ... Abbieannia is a kingdom that will never be destroyed by Glandelinia or any other nation, that it shall break Glandelinia in pieces and consume her kingdoms and shall be make an example before the world. But how can it be is the question?"²⁶

Each of the warring nations is ruled by an adult. With the exception of Glandelinia, which has a king, these rulers also lead their nations in battle. On the Christian side the two principal generals are Robert Angelic Vivian, Governor, later Emperor, of Angelinia (father of the Vivian girls), and his brother, Hanson Angelic Vivian, Governor of Calverinia (their uncle).²⁷ (see 2.6)

"General Hanson Vivian was one of the best and highest commanders of the whole Angelinian army. He has wonderfully powerful armies, had accomplished much already, and used his own shrewdness to defeat all his Glandelinian enemies of their many plans. Even any of the best christian generals pay tribute to him, for general Hanson Vivian taught them all the ways a general should do, and next

to general Robert Vivian he was the superior general in all sorts of ways and had the biggest armies in the world just now, (get your cow)."²⁸

The Glandelinian nation is ruled by the irresponsible and insignificant King Gannon Procile. It's evil armies are led by three brilliant generals, Johnston Jacken Manley, the sacrilegious enemy of God (4.1), and his all but indistinguishable sons, John and Huebaum Manley, both of whom meet their fate in the final volume of *The Realms*. These generals appear with such regularity throughout the story that we feel we know them, despite the fact that Darger fails to equip any one of them with anything resembling personality. Character can scarcely be said to exist in *The Realms*. The near absolute identity of the seven Vivian sisters extends to their relatives, and indeed to most of the adult participants in the war. Perhaps it is the exigencies of the situation of war that prevents him from dwelling on the character of active warriors. It may also be that adults were in general of far less interest to Darger than children. While this was certainly true, it fails to explain a lack of concern with personality that extends to all of his characters, young or old. So extreme is his failure to detect or depict unique qualities distinguishing one character from another that it appears possible that he did not really grasp the concept of personal identity (see Appendix A). This would also explain what appears to be his lack of interest in, or involvement with, real people.



4.1

Henry Darger

General Johnston

Jacken Manley.

14 x 15 1/2 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



4.2

Henry Darger

General Germania Vivian. Modified newspaper photograph. 11 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Having established the physical appearance of his heroes, he expects the reader to be able to recognize them.

"But come with me," invited the high officer presently, "I wish you to meet the main leader on this train. You'll be surprised to see who he is." ... Here were grouped a number of generals surrounding a tall strongly built man of six foot in height. His dense dark hair and mustache and beard gave a touch of unusual dignity to the rounded handsome face, while flashing gray eyes betokened the vigor that lurked in his well knit frame and indicated the one of the secrets of his power with men and all the nation. All of the child scouts were astonished and wondered how he got up here, and what his purpose was in being here. He was no less a person than Emperor Robert Vivian pride of the very Abbieannian nation and all the armies.²⁹

ALTHOUGH DARGER himself plays increasingly important roles, including that of general and leader of armies, he is also represented in the book (see chapter 5 below) by prominent figures who more clearly embody his deeper feelings and his needs, his dreams and his wishes, in a symbolic and very personal way. By far the most significant of these alter egos is the boy hero Jack Ambrose Evans, guardian and later adopted brother of the Vivian girls (see illustration 2.7). Because of Jack's intimate involvement with his small charges, and his constant need to rescue them from harm's way, he emerges more fully as a distinct personality, participating both in battle and in the outcome of the war. Unlike the other characters he seems to age, or at least to mature, assuming ever greater

responsibilities and stature until he emerges as a leading general contributing to the final victory of the Christians.

Indeed it is very disputable who are and were the worse enemies that the three Manleys ever had. But indeed general Evans proved himself to be the worse, the one who no Glandelinian army no matter what size could lick, or out-general.³⁰

In contrast to this self-appointed guardian who loves the little heroines with a passion verging on the suspect, there are the three adult brothers of the Vivian sisters. One of these young men, "the traitor Germania Vivian, General Robert Vivian's wicked rebellious son," the black sheep of the Vivian family, hates his sisters. Having turned atheist and rebel, he has joined the Glandelinians and fights as a general on the side of evil. Darger was aware of the tragic divisions between family members caused by the Civil War, and reproduces this painful conflict in the otherwise morally perfect Vivian family. In an early illustration, Darger depicts Germania in terrifying fashion (4.2). The inscription explains:

General Germania Vivian. Though he is the brother of the Vivian girls, he is a born Glandelinian, a traitor to his God, an enemy of God, and the worst foe children ever had to hear of. His wickedness is shocking to write, and all he does would take chapters to write. Notice the skull on his hat?³¹

Germania is killed in the final volume, though only after confessing his sins and receiving absolution.³²

Although most of Darger's characters are stereotypically good or bad, he occasionally describes positive aspects of even the most evil Glandelinians. This even-handedness may result from a vague awareness of the darker side of his own personality, and from the fact that other Henry Dargers are occasionally detected fighting on the side of the enemies of God. Certainly Darger respected the courage and ability of the foe. "Wicked and enemies of God as the Glandelinians were, there were found not even in this real world braver men."³³ For much of his book, the Glandelinians are triumphant, and the Christians are seemingly in constant danger of complete annihilation.

A few of his adult characters do reveal curious mixtures of opposed trends operating within their slightly more complex personalities. This is apparent in the case of a small number of Glandelinian generals who are not all bad. It is particularly true of General Izner Myletze, a powerful leader of the Glandelinian forces, whose treatment of his personal child slaves reveals his fundamental humanity. Darger was obviously aware of the uniqueness of this more complex character, and proud of his portrayal of unexpected decency in the midst of fiendish perversity. Inevitably, we wonder about who in Darger's experience this characterization of strength and honor in the face of evil may have been derived from. In the introduction to volume four, he writes:

Let the reader get well acquainted for the first time with the great general Izner Heidi Myletze and his officers, and follow his first campaign which is cut off in this volume to be added in volume 5. Follow him in his battles and of his behavior to his child slaves and see what kind of a

man he really is compared to the other insurrection generals like Manley and his confederates.³⁴

So subtle and fascinating is this dark and brooding figure that Darger follows him for most of two volumes, exploring a rare manifestation of moral ambivalence in a powerful Glandelinian military officer.

Glandelinian adults are capable of limitless violence in *The Realms*, violence which finds expression, as we will see, not in battle but in perverse activities focused on the children. Darkest of all the villains in the story is General Raymond Richardson Federal, murderer of the child rebel leader, little Annie Aronburg (see chapter 9 below). A clear-cut monster with no redeeming features ("[t]o have one good look at his face was enough. It would have made the moon faint"), he attracted Darger's attention repeatedly, with long descriptive paragraphs devoted to exploring pure evil untempered by human sympathy. Could Darger have had real experience of such a sadistic monster in his own childhood, someone who could have provided the model for Federal? Or was he capable of inventing him entirely out of his own darkness?

Darger's interest in matters military extended to the invention of uniforms symbolic of the opposed forces. The Christian soldiers wear distinctive and somewhat frivolous outfits of yellow and purple, colors intended to reflect Christian Easter symbolism. Occasionally trimmed with red, these fashionable costumes fail totally to awaken terror, with their oddly cheerful and inappropriate colors better suited to the pretty dress uniforms of the Vivian girls than to the military garb of adult Christian warriors. The Glandelinian uniform is

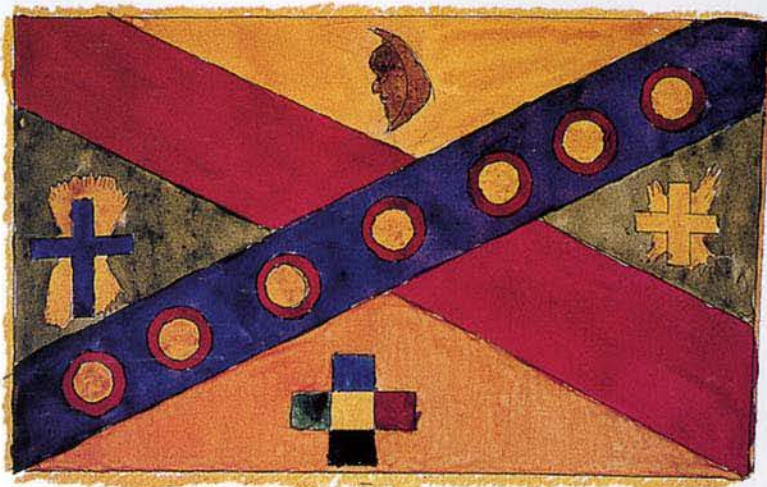


4.3

Henry Darger

National Flag of Angelina. Painting on paper. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

freely adapted from the gray-blue uniforms of American Confederate soldiers, thus betraying Darger's distaste for the Southern side in the American Civil War. As a result, the enemy appear as a rather colorless group of men, cold, emotionless, whose gray uniforms trimmed with black do strike terror in the hearts of their foes, inevitably awakening thoughts of death (see illustration 6.15). Darger was aware of this. Speaking of the dreaded Mic-Hollestonians, he tells us: "Though usually blue-gray their uniforms this time had the sickly pallor of a corpse."³⁵ In both written text and painting, Darger delights in inventing variations on the standard uniform, even introducing a note of humor.



4.4 above
Henry Darger
National Flag of Glandelinia. Painting on paper, with two holes for hanging. 17 x 14 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



OMARIAN CURDE FLAG
OF GLANDELINIA

4.5 center
Henry Darger
Omarian Curde Flag of Glandelinia. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



ZIMMERMANIAN FLAG OF
GLANDELINIA

4.6 right
Henry Darger
Zimmermanian Flag of Glandelinia. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

General Tomas Federal wore a gray swallow tail uniform coat in the style of the forties, light yellow trousers strapped under his well polished bluchers, and a spreading collar such as had not been seen since the world's creation and maybe never will be. It might be called a "Chocker smokestack" Yet there was something about this Glandelinian general that made his ancient costume the most natural thing, it suited him for a uniform as he suited the cause, and the medals and designs he wore on the uniform coat, and the shoulder strappings, made him appear more as if he was the butler of some high Monarch that ruled everything but the universe."³⁶

The distinctive outfits also allow for disguise, with all the possibilities of confusion that wearing an enemy uniform can provide.

Unexplained, however, is Darger's idiosyncratic use of mortarboard hats for the Glandelinian enemy. Rendered with great care, these hats are unmistakably academic rather than military. While Darger never explains his decision to introduce this oddly inappropriate headgear on the field of battle, he is quite specific concerning their identification. Speaking of a simple Glandelinian soldier, he says: "He wore the fashioned hats of the form all Glandelinians do of the 'College Professor' style."³⁷

He allows for a small distinction in this regard: "the hats shaped like the college professor's but the top square was much bigger."³⁸ Elsewhere he reveals specifically negative feelings about those who wear such hats, referring to them as wearing "that College High Ducky Duck square topped hat."³⁹ Because these hats are exclusively worn by

the enemy we must assume that his opinion of academics was less than positive, though in general professors and other experts are treated with great respect in *The Realms*.

Individual countries and specific military entities are symbolized by distinctive flags, invented with real delight by Darger, but commonly attributed to the children as designers (4.3).

The colors of the flag cloths that Gertrude Angeline placed on the whittled staffs were strikingly bright and beautiful and the shapes of the designs were varied | and curious. Indeed they did not resemble ordinary flags at all.⁴⁰

The Christian forces are distinguished by flags with overt religious symbolism, the sacred heart of Jesus, or the cross. These flags, a complete set of which remained in Darger's room, take on enormous symbolic importance in his depictions of assembled troops, or scenes of battle. Children often sacrifice their lives in protecting or recovering national flags (4.7). Glandelinian flags, not made by the Vivian princesses, are naturally less artistic (4.4, 4.5, 4.6).

... one made of red, yellow, green, and purple silk elegantly fringed, with this inscription, "Then conquer the christian dogs or die, for our cause is most just," with "Victory for Glandelinia or death" in the center. The other flag was of all red bunting, with the simple but horrible inscription, "Death to the Christian Dogs."⁴¹



AT CEDERNINE
Violet and her sisters
try to check panic
among Christians

Darger also took obvious pleasure in supplying the various forces with suitable weapons, which range from instruments used in the Middle Ages to modern revolvers, rifles, and flame throwers employed in the First World War. However, the major influence, in terms of military garb, weapons, and supplies, is that of the American Civil War. It is readily apparent that Darger was familiar with the various illustrations and photographs depicting that war. Cavalry forces, invariably misspelled "cavarly," play a major part in the war. He delighted in inventing wildly unsuitable neologisms as names for the various troops: Wheelers, Scoodlers, Whimsies, Gargoylians, Growleywoogs, etc. At times he takes similar joy in describing the appearance of violent and evil warriors in bizarrely inappropriate ways. This is particularly the case with two troops of extraordinarily violent and evil Glandelinians whose bobbed hair style causes them to appear like an army of large but strangely feminine little girls. We observe Darger without explanation playing freely with gender.

As they approached nearer it was seen that every man wore his hair like little girls, bobbed or the other various ways. Who were they? They were both the fierce and ferocious Mc-Hollestinians and Zimmermannians ... The whole christian center was forced, the christian batteries were in the possession of the imitation little girls.⁴²

On the Causes of an Imaginary War

As sole historian of the great Glandco-Angelinian war Darger understood that he had to confront the question of the cause of this conflict. Having created imaginary nations in an unreal realm, and set them to war, he had now to invent imaginary causes for the titanic struggle in which they were locked. Strangely, the issue is returned to again and again as though it could not be resolved. He was clearly obsessed with the question, and couldn't let go of it, as if he struggled with something which it was seemingly impossible for him to get at. The same causes are put forward again and again. Ultimately, it becomes apparent that he possessed no insight into the actual causes of his war. The real question obviously had to do with his compulsive need to write about, indeed to live in the midst of, war. What were his reasons for creating an imaginary war which came into being and continued to exist only because he needed it to? Evidently, the causes of the war lay deep within himself, too deep to be detected.

In volume seven (bound) he suddenly pauses to reexamine the problem in detail, listing twenty-five reasons for the war.⁴³ Right from the beginning we have been told that the fundamental cause concerns the mistreatment of children by the Glandelinians. In terms of the model provided by the American Civil War, this mistreatment finds expression in terms of slavery. However, we are told very little in *The Realms* about the economic and social exploitation of children as slaves, almost nothing about the work done by children, or the nature of their contribution in factory or field.

In this story for more than 43 years, child slavery existed in the Calverinian Country, hundreds of thousands of children torn from their parents were thrown into the horrible factories, made to work themselves to death without getting a cent, and horrors upon horrors almost equaled that of perdition.⁴⁴

Darger knew about the horrors of slavery from his Civil War studies, and from his reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book he often mentions.⁴⁵ His choice of the less common practice of child slavery requires explanation, since the use of child slaves (especially those who never grow up to be adult slaves) is unusual in twentieth-century America. His decision to concentrate on this rare form of slavery as the subject of his book is obviously important, perhaps reflecting his personal experience, and that of other small children, in institutions.⁴⁶ In a ringing speech to the troops, Darger, paraphrasing the Declaration of Independence, reveals his personal conception of slavery as it is applied to children.

That Childhood is endowed with certain inherent and inalienable rights among which are freedom from slavery and many other horrors which they have experienced, during the recent child slave years before this great war, that they have the right to play, to be happy, and to dream, the right to normal sleep of the night's season, the right to an education, that we may have an equality of opportunity for developing all that are in us of mind and heart.⁴⁷

If this were Darger's exclusive definition of child slavery, as essentially involving deprivation, then we could readily see how it might have been derived from his personal experience of life in the asylum. However, it quickly becomes apparent that the child slaves exist in *The Realms*, and in Glandelinia, largely as the helpless victims of perverse sexual and aggressive drives. They have been called into being so that they may be tortured and destroyed. In almost all scenes involving child slaves, both in the text and in pictures, they are being used simply as the passive victims of the sadistic and murderous violence of adults. It may be that Darger knew of no other way of speaking about adult abuse of children than by speaking of child slavery. In his list of the causes of the war, he refers quite specifically to "the massacre of children at Calverine during the height of the child labor rebellion." He describes these attacks in detail:

Glandelinians disguised as Abbieannians and Tripolygonlians butchering children at Calverine and causing them the most horrible tortures especially in Andrean, strangling children to death, smothering them, and laying open their bodies while alive, and left to die in that condition. Throughout the whole month of October, 1910 ...⁴⁸

Among the deaths of millions of children, the death of one child in particular, is returned to again and again as the chief cause of the war: "The assassination of the child labor rebel Anna Aronburg which was the most shocking child murder ever caused by the Glandelinian Government."⁴⁹ This murder, generally referred to as the "Aronburg Mystery," is the irrational and yet fundamental

cause of the war that is *The Realms*. Throughout the vast work, various characters struggle to comprehend how the death of one child can unleash a great war that ultimately threatens all mankind. And indeed, it seems to be the case that this mystery lies at the heart both of *The Realms* and of Darger's obsessional creative drive. "It was predicted that the solving of the Aronburg mystery, or for the revenge of her assassins, was the only hope of the christian nations winning the war."⁵⁰

THE SECOND MAJOR CAUSE of war in *The Realms* is religious controversy. The Glandelinians, once good Catholics, have turned away from God. They have become aggressive atheists, using blasphemy as a form of rebellion.⁵¹ Their violence toward children and other Christian believers is exhibitionistically calculated to offend God by harming those he most loves.

Glandelinia is a powerful nation ... The Glandelinians anger God by worshipping false Gods on purpose to defy Him, and though Glandelinia is a powerful nation she is very wicked. They even worship stones, animals, dogs, sticks, and wicked things, even the walls and houses, clouds, hills, nay the very devils themselves are adored as Gods. There continually has been rebellions against parents, cruelty, murder, bad passions of every kind. The strong cruelly oppress the weak, men, women and children are so given up to the pleasures of soft and indulgent lives that their hearts are hardened against the sights of pain and misery. The weak and helpless children taken from the vanquished nations are made as slaves, the poor, the old, and the sick, are

treated with a barbarity that only the most frightful selfishness can explain. All this they do knowingly to displease God, because they hate him bitterly, as the worse bitterness can explain ... this is the kind of nation Glandelinia is.⁵²

Darger, as we will see in chapter 12, was deeply perplexed by the existence of evil in a world ruled by an all powerful God. This fundamental confusion originated in his childhood and was never resolved. The war is fought by the Christian nations in order to punish the enemies of God. Darger has no qualms about Christians making war. Despite the justice of their cause, however, he often arranges things so that they will lose. Much of the blood that is shed in *The Realms* is Christian blood. Darger is furious with God. The unrestrained violence of the Glandelinians, their extraordinary success in battle, their murderous assaults on children, allows him, vicariously, to express his rage at a god who allows evil to exist in the world and does nothing about it.

ALL OF THIS represents Darger's conscious attempt to account for the war that is *The Realms* — its onset as well as the chaos, both natural and man-made, that increasingly inundates the Unreal. He portrays a world torn asunder, a world in chaos far surpassing anything to be found in the real world, even the Great War which was raging as he wrote. He needed this chaos as it resembled something in himself. The war he describes over the course of many years is his war, emerging from within. Here we touch on psychological issues with which we are not yet ready to deal. Throughout *The Realms* Darger hints at personal reasons for the war and for the Christian defeat he leads us to

anticipate. These private causes of the war make no sense to the characters in the book, because they have to do with the personal experience of its author, who they do not know. They also make little sense to the reader. Darger, as author, confronts God by inventing an alternate world in which good and decent Christians suffer and meet defeat, and he does this to punish God. Yet, his complaints, voiced over and over, seem oddly inconsequential: He lost some money in a bank failure. He was rejected from the army. Early manuscripts of *The Realms* were lost. A photograph from a newspaper disappeared. Of these last he writes: "My two losses have been very serious, but the loss of the Aronburg picture has been the greatest, has caused the torment of the Vivian girls, and the frightful fury of the great war."⁵³ These private disappointments we are told represent the basis for Darger's lifelong anger with an unfeeling and impassive God. To the psychologist they would appear to be screen memories, concealing an unconscious reality of far greater significance. Clearly, Darger was involved in a war for reasons he could not describe or know. Ultimately Glandelinia was to fall. The avalanche of terror he envisioned in a world of his own creation surprised even him.

Such a downfall of a wicked nation like Glandelinia, that Babylon, Rome, or other wicked countries never experienced, and in a way that would flabbergast the world and astonish all historians and writers and all college professors, including I the author.⁵⁴

The American Civil War

That Darger began in 1911 to write the history of an imaginary civil war may be explained, at least in part, by a single significant fact: The year 1911 was the Semi-Centennial of the onset of the American Civil War. No war in US history has exerted so formative an influence on the psyche of the American people as this blood-soaked conflict which claimed more lives than all other wars in which the nation has engaged combined.⁵⁵ The fiftieth anniversary inspired intense reactions of various kinds, both North and South. For many individuals the reawakened memories would have approximated the agonizing stimulation of raw nerves. The passage of half a century was by no means sufficient to have erased the passionate memories and feelings etched by pain in the still fragmentary identity of the country. Many veterans and soldiers' families were still alive, and many of the conditions which inspired the Civil War were still far from resolved. During the next four years, with the anniversary of each battle, each victory or defeat, feelings of joy or anguish would be awakened again and again. For these four years all of America became curiously preoccupied with history.⁵⁶ Darger was certainly not immune to historical factors and moods, and given his very personal link with the anniversary of the war's onset (his birth date), it is not surprising that he followed the Semi-Centennial events with intense excitement. In Chicago, the anniversary of the war's beginning was initiated by the firing of a sixty-three-cannon salute in Grant Park.⁵⁷ The evocative sounds of battle echoing through Chicago served to introduce a series of events each of which would have inspired powerful feelings in the nineteen-year-old Darger. It is possible that he

sought to respond to this exciting moment in history with an event of his own. Safely established in Chicago, with a job and room at St. Joseph's Hospital, he seems to have felt ready in 1911 to undertake a project worthy of his ambition and his intellect, the writing of the history of an imaginary civil war. But why historical writing and why an imaginary war?

Of particular importance in this connection was the decision of the editors of the *Chicago Daily News* to begin publication on April 3, 1911, of a "day-by-day" narrative of events connected with the Civil War.⁵⁸ This unusual blending of journalism and history caught Darger's attention, reawakening his involvement with Civil War history. The series provided an example of a very unusual form of history writing previously unknown to him, the day-by-day chronicling of a war in the newspaper. Major personalities, generals, politicians, presidents; crucial battles and sieges; political decisions and military strategy, all were presented as if they were happening in the present rather than fifty years earlier.

While the young Darger may have found it difficult to contemplate the writing of a book, he was certainly capable of writing a daily report on events unfolding in the Realms. Identifying himself as a newspaper reporter covering a war was easier than claiming the academic authority of a historian or scholar. By writing as if directly from the field of battle, he could contribute to history without having to concern himself with the whole scope of a war seen in retrospect. He could legitimately write with no clear idea of what the next day or week might bring. This is indeed how Darger wrote, adding each night to a narrative, without any absolute sense of where events were ultimately going, or what the final outcome of the conflict in *The Realms* would be.⁵⁹ Even the results of individual battles remain in doubt until each battle is entirely over.

The tale of the great battle of Lebanon as recited in the foregoing chapter is necessarily as best as it could have been written. Yet it is but a bird's eye view of one of the most destructive, if indeed not the most terrible battle calamities that hit both sides simultaneously, that both armies tortured each other with, and that had ever raged since the war commenced. As the battle is still raging though on its conclusion it is hard to say what its outcome is until we go through a portion of the following chapter.⁶⁰

Henry was obviously in no hurry to get to the end. The fact that his chronicle soon went beyond the length of any known book was of no more significance than the total number of pages over the course of several years in a newspaper.

His model, then, for the kind of writing which we see in *The Realms* was the ongoing series of articles in the *Chicago Daily News*. Because the authors of the newspaper articles were writing their account of Civil War events in retrospect, they could not only refer back to things that had happened in the past, but forward, hinting at things to come: decisive battles, horrible defeats. Darger too made use of this unusual perspective, delighting in the fact that he did know, at least in a broad sense, what the future held in store for the Christians and their enemies. He is very skillful at maintaining suspense, dropping hints, setting the scene long in advance, or misleading the reader, or God, about what is about to happen.

However, given the fact that the *Chicago Daily News* was covering the War between the States in exhaustive detail, there was obviously no need for a second day-by-day account of that war. In any case Darger was not able to write a serious account of this or any other aspect of American history, even if he might have wanted to. He undoubtedly understood this. He had long since become incapable of sustained objectivity, having immersed himself in an ongoing fantasy concerned with events taking place in an alternate world. He would seem to have opted out of the outside world well before he began to write. Imagination had taken over, and Darger, while struggling to maintain himself in the real world, had, to a considerable extent, removed himself from the demands of reality. Having constructed an alternate world in fantasy, it was natural that he write its history, document its civil war. In this realm he was the only historian, the only expert. As a journalist and historian operating *In the Realms of the Unreal*, he removed himself from the danger of competition,

from any risk of critical evaluation or comparison. He had *The Realms* all to himself. Even God had to yield to Henry when it came to the creation and manipulation of the unreal. The civil war whose historian he was was an essentially internal event, occurring within the strife-torn confines of his own mind. In a real sense, the history Darger was writing was his own. Quite possibly he knew at some level of consciousness that he would also be its only reader.

If he was to emulate the newspaper historians, he would have to invent a war of his own, a civil war paralleling in some respects that fought in the United States fifty years earlier, but a war taking place in the present, in real time. Accordingly, the day-by-day account of warfare in *The Realms* is described, not as past history, but as an actual event beginning in 1911, and ending in 1916. "A war correspondent whose name was Darger who was an eye witness told or wrote a story of unparalleled horror."⁶¹ Perhaps he intended the writing to evolve with the war, reaching completion in 1916. However, once fully immersed in his new world, he was unable to bring things to an end. One adventure led on to another, battle followed battle. While the Glandco-Angelinian war was brought to an end in four years, seven months, as promised, the writing went on for well over twenty years. Darger had become lost in *The Realms of the Unreal*.

The Great War

Paradoxically, Darger's writing about an imaginary war was interrupted by a real war. In April 1917 the United States entered the First World War on the side of the Allied Powers, choosing to involve itself in what had become a worldwide conflagration.⁶² Mobilization was begun at once; conscription was initiated and the training of large numbers of raw recruits got underway. Henry, now twenty-five years old, was drafted and sent for basic training to Camp Grant, near Rockford, Illinois. Given his interest in matters military, he might have been expected to respond to his new situation with anticipation and excitement. Perhaps he did initially, stimulated at finding himself once again living in a group situation, surrounded by young men preparing themselves to face the rigors of war. However, the men with whom Darger would now be sharing his existence were not at all like those he had known in an institution for the mentally handicapped. In this new situation he would have stood out as strange or childlike, and he may have been confused by the rough-and-ready life of normally aggressive and sexually aware young men.

An additional element which may have added to Darger's confusion was the fact of his German name and ancestry. Raised by a father proud of his family's origin in Germany, Darger may well have felt a degree of ambivalence about this war in Europe in which he was expected to fight against a despised foe. The fact that various Henry Dargers fight in *The Realms* on both sides of the conflict supports the possibility that an unconscious identification with and sympathy for the German enemy may have disturbed his ability to pursue this war

unequivocally. However, nowhere in his writings does he ever express hostility to the distant American nation. His occasional references to America and Americans in *The Realms* are invariably positive, even idealized.

Darger probably found it difficult to conform to the physical and emotional demands of basic training. The battlefields for which these forces were being prepared were known to be uniquely ghastly, and the training, through which they were being rushed at high speed, involved preparation for filthy trench warfare of a kind infinitely remote from Darger's romantic notions of war. In retrospect, Henry said he hated the military. Nevertheless, in that he was sent for further training to Camp Logan near Houston, Texas, he must have functioned at least adequately. He now wore the uniform of a private (found preserved in his room after his death). In the three months of basic training he undoubtedly was made aware of some of the realities of military life and of modern warfare. The First World War introduced a considerable number of new features unknown in previous wars, with machinery playing a far greater part than ever before. Henry seems to have been made unusually aware of the need for complex logistical planning, and in *The Realms* he carefully considers the difficulties involved in moving huge quantities of armaments and supplies to the front lines. Trains, trucks, and cars are continually crossing his war-torn landscapes. He makes occasional reference to both the telegraph and telephone in his writings. He was aware of landmines and grenades, and envisioned planting underground explosives on a scale far surpassing anything employed in the First World War. Still, with bombs bursting and rockets arching across the sky, we have to remind ourselves that Darger

never saw battle, never made it to Europe. Certainly, his military training influenced his imaginative conception of war, but not as much as we might expect. Essentially his fantasies remained firmly attached to romantic visions of Civil War battlefields, and to the rather amateurish collision of men and animals in close physical combat. Elements typical of the First World War were simply incorporated randomly into his imaginative vision, in no way modifying his idealized conception of ritualized bloodshed. Perhaps it was, in part, his inability to make the move from fantasy to realistic preparation for modern battlefield conditions which eventually convinced his superiors that he might be more of a liability than company "L" could tolerate. For a variety of physical reasons, none of which seems sufficient, he was honorably discharged after three months and returned to civilian life.⁶³

The psychological impact of this rejection cannot be overestimated. Its contribution to the shaping of *The Realms* was far more significant than external factors derived from his short experience of life in the army. Once again he had been found unfit for life in the real world, though on this occasion he was sent, not to an institution, but home. He was deeply upset by this rejection, and by the shame of being removed from his company and sent back to Chicago. He describes this event in disguised form.

Inlisted into the Glandelinian army September 20th, 1913. In expectation of having chance to see the great war. Reduced in health at the most critical time. Failure of limbs, and sight, and shoulder to support me to make a success in drilling. Eyes go on the bum. Rejected from the military service of Glandelinia December 6, 1913.

Sent home. Another cause why christian defeat is impending. Most serious break of all. Will not relent in threatening safty of the christians ... rejection from Glandelinian army shall be avenged.⁶⁴

Although clear evidence, in the form of his military record, is lacking, I am inclined to put forward the suggestion that Darger responded to his brief period of military training by profound and increasing regression to early patterns of childhood disturbance. Faced with unique pressures to conform to extremes of mental and physical exertion, coupled with mounting, and realistic, anxiety about an uncertain future in a faraway country, it is probable that he began to crumble psychologically, decompensating to reveal an underlying psychotic organization.⁶⁵ In this connection, his honorable discharge of December 1917 undoubtedly conceals more than it reveals. From this point on, and probably to a far greater extent than earlier in his life, he opted out of the real world; retreating decisively into a world of fantasy, he now participated in an increasingly systematized alternate world. As was the case with his childhood inability to function, at home and at school, Darger appears to have had little or no understanding of this later situation. He reveals no real grasp of the reasons for his rejection from the army, no insight into the nature of his mental state. Evidence in both his autobiography and in *The Realms* does suggest the extent of his feelings of humiliation and anger. He responded with feelings of rage, blaming God for his rejection from the army and for the physical defects which he understood as the cause. What must it have meant for him to return to Chicago knowing that his company, his friends and companions, were shipped off to Europe to fight

and die in a war from which he had been excluded?⁶⁶ In volume eight of *The Realms* there is a scene in which General Aronburg complains that he can't manage to get into a really big battle because the enemy won't fight with him. His description of how he feels as a result seems to relate to Darger's pain at not being part of the war effort.

The way this war is going on and with me not yet as seriously engaged as I desire, I feel like a man clothed with rags, standing in the street begging. I feel like I had a great burden on my back. But I cannot battle the enemy. He won't fight me. The Glandelinian generals who I have persued and tried to goad into battle run off. From all that has occurred in Calverinia and elsewhere since this cruel war started I have wept and trembled. I have written out a sort of book, and wrote therein of what has occurred, and have a long list of disasters. Many times I have broken out into a lamentable cry ... most of the time instead of spending nighttime sleeping, I in thinking of these fierce disasters have spent the greater parts of the days and nights in sighs and tears.⁶⁷

It may have been precisely at this time, in December 1917, that the need for a war of his own, a private war fully under his command, became compulsively and massively necessary. If we put aside the various dates provided in Darger's journals for the beginning of his activity as author of *The Realms* (1910, 1911, 1912), internal evidence contained in volume one suggests a date just after his departure from the army for the beginning of his involvement in the writing of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. If *The Realms* originated in childhood fantasy, later becoming a somewhat vague and unrealistic literary endeavor (an adventure story for children), it now took on an unmistakable psychopathological cast, an obsessional preoccupation with violence and death, a mad involvement with bloody warfare, with murder and massacre, far surpassing even the terrifying brutality of the First World War. The admixture of violent sadism and distorted sexuality directed at little girls reveals the extent of his loss of control and his break with reality. The delusional, truly insane war in which he was now engaged in the quietness of his room endured far longer than the First World War, surpassing the four years, seven months which he had established for its fictional duration, occupying at least the first half of his creative life. If we include the illustrations, it extended well beyond the Second World War, pictorial images of which influenced his later representations of battle, of concentration camps for children, and of inhuman violence justified by war.

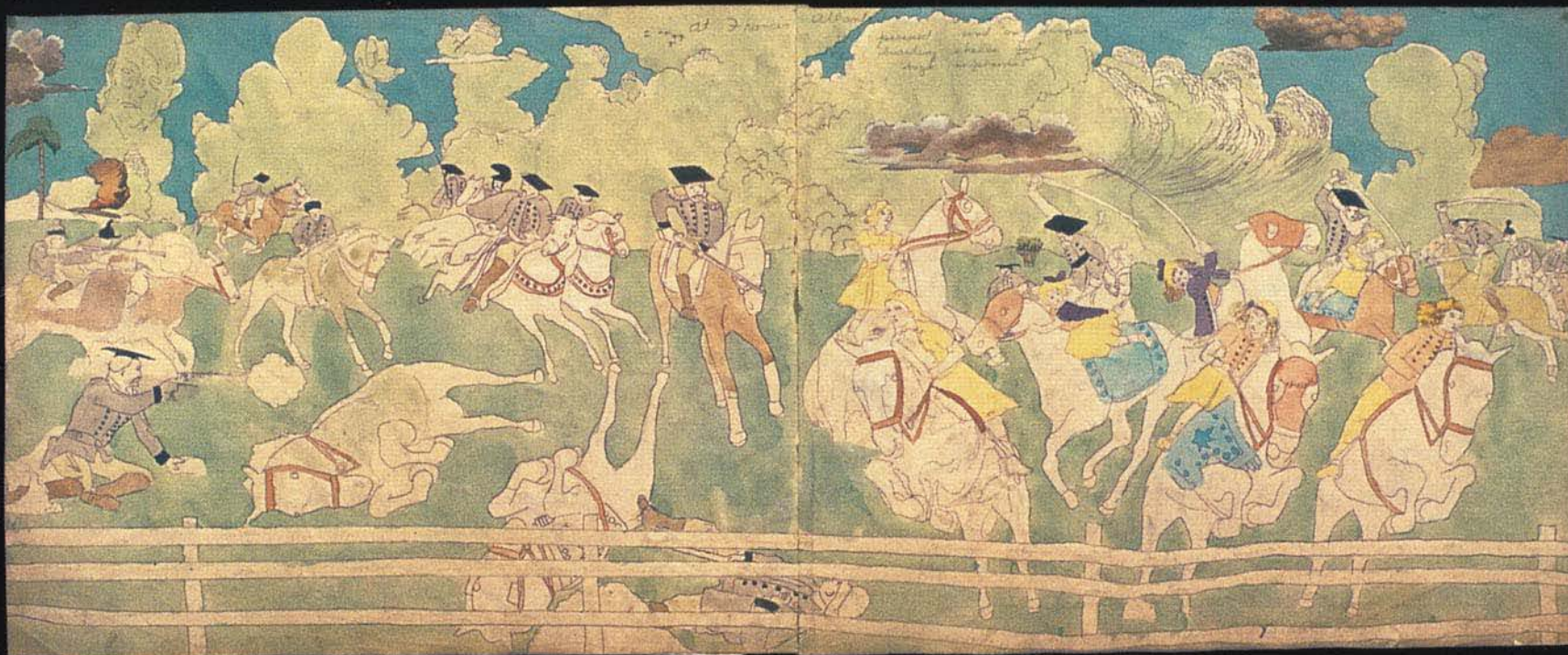
4.8

Henry Darger

*At Francis Atlanta. Are
persued and in danger
by bursting shells and
high explosives.*

Collage-drawing.

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Agglutinative History

Although Darger liked to portray himself as a historian, he was delightfully cavalier in his handling of historical detail and chronology. He seems to have enjoyed producing irrational mixtures of elements borrowed from a variety of wars, with Roman generals fighting beside heroes of the Civil War. While most of his imaginative portrayal of war was derived from his reading of Civil War histories, he playfully, and quite consciously, incorporated aspects and personalities belonging to earlier, as well as more recent, wars, along with imagery found in literature and mythology. Most surprising is his unexpected, somewhat vague, knowledge of ancient history. Roman generals and historians (Catus Gaul, Suetonius), and even a primitive British queen (Boadicea), stray across the field of battle, running the risk of an encounter with characters from Bunyan (*A Pilgrim's Progress*) or *The Wizard of Oz*. It is important to remember in this connection that Darger frequently used the Latinized pseudonym Dargarius, both in *The Realms* and in reality. Demons and evil spirits participate in battle, as Darger employs biblical analogies based on a prospective war between the legions of Lucifer and those of the archangel Michael. Civil War generals (Sherman, Grant, Lee) appear from time to time, along with equally famous individuals from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

Darger's sense of humor comes into play on the battlefields as he introduces not only unexpected characters, but incongruous technologies, weapons, and modes of combat. Cavalry forces are a constant factor in Darger's war, with horses figuring frequently in his descriptions of battle

and in the illustrations [4. 8]. Trench and guerrilla warfare are all but unheard of in his writings, though both were employed at various times in the War between the States. Darger preferred pitched battles in which millions of troops are arranged, facing each other in a long line, ultimately to clash man to man. Rifles, muzzle-loaded muskets, hand grenades, sabers and swords, compete with Civil War artillery pieces firing grape and canister, mines, rockets, exploding shells, and bombs. While telegraph and signal flags are popular, messages are still carried by hand, or conveyed from one general to another by a simple telephone call. Hot-air balloons and small planes appear in the skies, while below, submarines armed with torpedoes vie with iron-clad vessels and motorized gunboats in blocking the harbors or conveying troops up river. Set-piece battles can go on for days, with individual encounters separated by gentlemanly truces at night. Only the scale of operations, with millions of combatants, and the involvement of all of the countries composing *The Realms*, suggests that a fully modern world war is being waged. Of the battle of Lebanon we are told:

It was a sort of catastrophe for both sides combined before which all civilization will stand aghast when the news comes out. It can be said that general Hanson in this disastrous and vicious battle lost more of his men in dead and wounded than the Allies and Central Powers combined in the four years of battles in the whole world war ... the most deadly combat in true modern history.⁶⁸

The First World War was fought by the entire manhood of the belligerent countries, and this is true of Darger's war as well. His war is unique, of course, in introducing children, on rare occasion on the battlefield, more commonly as spies, scouts, and messengers. While he desperately needed a war to prove his courage, fitness, and organizational ability (intelligence), the war he created owed little to his adult experience, and much to adolescent, and earlier, fantasy formation. Having been rejected by the army, and the world, he turned his back on the Great War to invent a far greater conflict of his own. When he does mention the First World War, it is almost invariably to point out how much larger his war is by contrast.

The sufferings of the Angelinians and Calverinians during the great National catastrophe, has been greater than any known in our own history of the world. None of the fearful horrors perpetrated in the various [incidents] of the Great War in Europe, and all the wars put together, even the massacres of the Armenians, can compare with the tragic lot of the Calverinians.⁶⁹

The reference to the Armenian massacres, which reached their tragic peak during the First World War, proves that Darger was well informed about current history, and that he was reading newspapers with considerable care.

As was the case in the Civil War and in the First World War, certain major battles in *The Realms* stand out, assuming particular interest as a result of their unusual length, numbers of combatants or losses, or in terms of their ultimate effect on the duration and outcome of the war. On the other hand, each battle, while it is being fought, tends to be described in superlative terms as surpassing all others.

No record of any of the battles of the past can come to the reader in more appalling form than these stories of sudden ruin and terror and terrible slaughter by the battles of St Ethelreda and Lebanon ... It is the purpose of this author to form a faithful record of the concluding section of the story of the awful hours of battle and its ruinous effects when for the wounded minutes out in that dreadful field seemed years, and to preserve an accurate chronological of its events ... Lebanon was indeed a murderous battle ... horrors beyond description made the scene one fit for the pen of a Dante.⁷⁰

While Darger's vision of war incorporates elements of romanticism and patriotic idealism, even allowing for occasional humor, his ultimate objective is the portrayal of a world wracked and torn, of civilization destroyed, earth in upheaval, and mankind inundated with its own blood. Lacking any personal experience of war, he nevertheless entered imaginatively, with almost delusional intensity, into the full extent of human aggression and suffering. His tone throughout is serious, his mood dark. Only the adventures of the Vivian girls and their friends

occasionally serve to relieve his obsessional depiction of the triumph of evil, and of a helpless world on the edge of destruction.

On occasion Darger pauses to contemplate the spectacle he is creating, commenting, either in his own voice, or through one of his characters, on the terrible nature of the war unfolding before us. One such summing up occurs toward the end of the story in a speech delivered to a group of newspaper correspondents by General Hanson Vivian. While the brief oration provides Hanson with an opportunity to review the course of the war thus far, it also serves to illuminate Darger's understanding of the nature of war.

General Hanson's Speech on War

People call war hell, but I do not. War is a blasphemy of all living creatures, the world itself in general, and also of heaven and earth. A war like this one is a scourge beyond the limit of region when such an enemy like this devilish nation invades a christian country.

When this damanating war began, and it was started by the Angelinians themselves, I did not think it possible that Glandelinian militarism was so strong and neither did I think that the enemy would ever invade the country of Calverinia. Despite our defeats and disasters in the southern soil of Angelinia in the earliest part of this bloody war, the Glandelinians met too strong an opposition to be able to make any sort of invasion of the Angelinian countries, and while they finally fell back

toward Glandelinia, whether they won battles or not, immense armies of these damable Glandelinian savages of hell immediately poured into Calverinia by sea, striking back the Abbieannian fleets that came to oppose them, and starting a regular hell of destruction wherever they went. Of course, this was the cause of so many Angelinian armies being rushed into Calverinia as fast as possible, and though we wrought a storm of terrific battles, a scene of battles which shocked the whole world off their very feet, we are still here resisting an invasion that it seems the very heavens full of angels, nay even the Blengiglomenean creatures could not stem.

Soldiers, children, and so on, had experienced every intolerable event of this titanic war, children had been assassinated by the Glandelinians in a way that would not be fit to be pictured either in plain or motion graphy, and such terrible explosions that a million dollars spent by one Motion Picture firm could not produce. Disaster upon disaster, horror upon horror, the suffering of innocent nations on account of the hellish blockades of Calverinian seaports and rivers, the Christmas sorrows, starvation, and diseases which had been caused by the enemy, thousands of gigantic conflagrations in one day scattered over the country, either in forests, oil fields, and cities and towns, great volcanic eruption, the blasting to pieces of volcanoes, the ruthless destruction of farms, and the scores of battles raging every-

where in less than a days time. Disasters by a hundred score occurring in every battle, slight or severe, and God knows what.

War by many has been called Hell, but I do not call it hell. In fact hell with its intolerable horrors, and so on, is only a tame cat compared to this dreadful horror. Hell has [no] place here, and if it was here, it would literally flee from the horrors of this greatest of wars.⁷¹

On a conscious level Darger seems to have been troubled by the destructive potential of mankind. He could play with war in *The Realms*, and yet, imaginatively, he was able to enter deeply into its reality, the pointless violence and the suffering war causes. In using war as the principal subject of his great epic, he may actually have experienced uneasy feelings of guilt at celebrating a fantasy war. This is one of the reasons for his emphatic reminders that his story is unreal. In volume three Darger makes one of his relatively rare appearances as author, stepping out of his alternate world to address the reader:

To make matters more reliable, I must say as many others do say, that indeed war is one of the most awful things that can ever happen to man, and except in the defense of liberty, or of right, or such causes as the Christian side have here in this rebellion, war is one of the most wicked, and yet one of the worst scourages of mankind entirely, as it has much more disasterious consequences than even cyclonic storms, earthquakes, and so on, and filled with countless tragedies. Indeed men have been called heroes who were mere bullies, murderous scoundrels, simply

because they fought well, but I will say that indeed some time will come, and come promptly when the world will feel the truth of the words of Jesus: Blessed are the peacemakers: and the men of peace who have helped others to live better, will be more honored than those who have caused many unnecessary deaths. Many wars, rebellions, and other struggles which had been thought glorious at one time, are seen to have been foolish and wicked, and many men whose lives might have been useful have been killed in these wars because of some ones foolish fancy, and those who survived and returned home found nothing but devastation, their children gone or rendered homeless and without shelter. Good countrysides desolated and everything known as wars desolation. Thus in this statement I wish to remind the reader that this war I'm writing was, on the side of the enemy the most wickedest wars ever known of, of which, if it probably would have really happened, would have brought the world itself against the Glandelinians alone. So to leave off battles I'm going to give descriptions of experiences that had been made by many during the siege of the months of December and January, and especially the ones the Vivian girls went through after leaving Andrean a little before Christmas. Now on with the war.⁷²

Perhaps Darger's father, coming from Europe, had profound feelings about the horrors of war and shared them with his son. We know that his uncle August was old enough to have been aware of the Franco-Prussian war, though there is no evidence that the German branch of the Darger family suffered as a result of it. In his autobiography Henry refers to this war:

My uncle August told me that, when in his late teens, he witnessed, at a safe distance, the Battle of Meldorf, at which the French army was beaten badly. It was during the early part of the year long Franco-Prussian War, when the French were invading Germany. They were soon driven out, but the war then raged fiercely in France until the main French army was overthrown at Cedon.⁷³

While Henry has his facts somewhat confused, this passage in *The History of My Life* does suggest that various wars were a topic of conversation on the German side of the Darger family, and that at least some of Darger's realistic attitudes concerning the sufferings imposed by war had their origin in stories he was told in childhood.⁷⁴ Certainly, some of his ideas about the ugliness of war, as well as his ambivalence in regard to military heroes, sound far more realistic than we might expect of the author of *The Realms*. There is also a hint in Darger's interjection which implies that he was aware that too many descriptions of battles may be excessively trying for the reader, and so he proposes to "leave off battles" and write of other things.

at Sunbeam Creek.
 Zimmerman's Glandelinian
 cavalry pursued Vernon girls



Vernon girls pursued
 within the Christian lines
 by Glandelinian horsemen

Picturing the Battlefield: A Panoramic View

4.9

Henry Darger

At Sunbeam Creek. Zimmermannian Glandelinian cavarly pursue Vivian girls [left panel]; *Vivian girls persued within the christian lines by Glandelinian horsemen* [right panel]. Two-panel collage-drawing. 19 x 48 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Individual battles in *The Realms* are each identified by a name usually derived from the name of the place in which they were fought.⁷⁵ At one point late in the war, Darger claims that there have been 565 battles.⁷⁶ There were to be a good many more than that before the war was over. He did keep track of each of them, compiling lists of battles in a separate journal. He probably intended to make pictures representing each and every one. Much later, when he had begun to illustrate his war with large-scale collage-drawings, the place names, carefully inscribed on small labels attached to the picture surface, served to differentiate one pictorial battle from another. The more prominent battles are represented by, not one, but several illustrations.⁷⁷

It is natural to assume that in rendering multiple scenes taken from a single battle Darger was attempting to depict a temporal sequence, selecting major events or high points occurring in battles which last for several days, but this was not always his intention. On occasion he was more concerned with space than with time. Small notes, which usually are placed on the upper edge of drawings, serve to indicate the direction — north, south, east, or west — which his wide-angle view was intended to capture. In some cases battle scenes, each oriented in one of the cardinal directions, were intended together to form a more or less complete, 360 degree, panoramic view of the field of battle. The unusual long and narrow scroll-like format he adopted was particularly helpful in depicting the complexities of a vast battlefield, and may indeed have been utilized for this reason.⁷⁸

Darger had access to contemporary newspapers and magazines filled with photographs, illustrations, and written accounts of the various conflicts going on in Europe (the First and Second World Wars, the Spanish Civil War, etc.). Few of these pictures would have used the horizontal scroll format, though double-page spreads were popular. He collected illustrations of the American Civil War from various sources: books, newspapers, illustrated magazines, and comic books. Some of this pictorial material appears quite directly in his early experiments with illusionistic collage, where cut-out bits of photographs and engraved illustrations from both the Civil War and the First World War are incorporated and juxtaposed. His early portraits of prominent generals were derived from the same popular sources, either overpainted or traced. On occasion he assembles several portraits on a page, with labels beneath, obviously copying contemporary news magazine layout (see illustrations 3.15 and 3.16).

The later, fully developed collage-drawings actually owe less to borrowed depictions of war, making use instead of modified images of football players, gun-fighters, and race horses, with or without their jockeys, for the construction of imaginary, richly suggestive scenes of battle. Comic books supplied the stylized bomb blasts and explosions which Darger traced into his war scenes. He collected all such graphic abstractions wherever he found them — small diagrams of tremendous forces erupting from the ground or bursting in the sky. Comic book layout also accounts for the many collage-drawings which include a series of two, three, or four pictures arranged in a row, though this format is only occasionally used by Darger to imply a chronological or narrative sequence of related events (4.9).

War plays a less dominant role in the illustrations of *The Realms* than in the text. While Darger's need for violence had probably not diminished, his aggressive drives found more direct expression in those years (1940s, 1950s, and 1960s) in the more extreme and idiosyncratic scenes of the massacre of children (see chapter 11 below). It is also probable that the pictorial depiction of full-scale battle scenes presented him with serious technical and spatial problems. Certainly, there is a very marked difference between his written accounts of battle and their pictorial transcriptions. I want to attempt to get at the nature of this contrast.

One of Darger's most successful action scenes is the collage-drawing *At the Battle of Norma Catherine* (4.11). Though it depicts only one side of the conflict (the Christian forces as seen looking "North"), he has certainly captured something of the dynamic excitement of an infantry charge. The picture is beautifully composed, with all of the figures moving across the surface from left to right. Starting with a complicated pile-up of overlapping figures partly submerged in a trench, he depicts men charging across an open space in the direction of the enemy. The careful suggestion of figures diminishing in size as they move back in space was probably copied from some pictorial source, but the insertion of individual figures, totally out of scale, is Darger's own contribution to the battle. As the figures move forward they grow dramatically, and irrationally, larger and physically more active. He has sought out individuals engaged in every kind of activity: kneeling to shoot, running, falling forward as though hit by enemy fire, or motionless in death (bottom left). He has learned to avoid excessive complexity, while still suggesting frenetic activity. The right

side of the composition includes only four major figures, two of which are traced repeats of the same running soldier. But by incorporating disparate running figures, depicted from wildly different angles (frontal, three-quarter rear view), he is able to introduce erratic movements suggestive of mad intensity. Darger's curiously constructed space, complex and often irrational in the extreme, captures his private sense of conflict, his deeply subjective vision of war. The figures, though present on a single battlefield, are isolated one from another by the unrelated angles from which they are depicted and seen, so that each soldier is moving to his own internal choreography. The result, in terms of space and movement, is chaos indeed.

In the midst of so much activity, Darger suddenly introduces a very different rhythm, that of the little girl dancing atop a tree stump. Placed almost exactly on the central axis of the picture her weightless figure becomes the oddly fragile focus around which all the action seems to rotate. Attired, like the soldiers, in a Christian uniform, she bravely urges them on by waving the flag of Angelinia energetically in the sky above them. Her madcap presence establishes the paradoxical unreality, even innocence, of this candy-box battle. Ultimately it is the color which contributes most to the essentially playful nature of Darger's pictorial evocation of war. Outfitted in the lush purples, reds, and yellows of the Christian armies, the charging warriors wage war in a peaceful pastel landscape: pale green fields, a distant body of deep blue water, the lighter blue sky filled with white clouds. Small matter that these fluffy clouds

are in fact bombs bursting in air, or that miniature soldiers are seen in the distance being blown to pieces by exploding shells. This is the idealized war of a summer day, a ballet battle in the Realms of the Unreal. We are obviously justified in asking whether the innocent evocation of war typical of the illustrations was intended. If so, how do we account for the radical contrast with the realism of the much earlier vision of war presented in the text?

Millions of men on both sides howled at each other like demons, striking at each other, pouring a murderous fire at point blank, cutting, stabbing, hacking, thrusting, and slashing like wild savages bent on wholesale butchery, while amid all this was an indescribable tumult of bayonets adding to the din, the Angelinians wavered in the furnace of fire, staggered, broke and ran, but undaunted regathered again, in hundreds of human waves, plunging again into the mighty inferno of fire and smoke, the whole gray line roaring like a thrillion cannon, blazed like hell and its' damanation, the Angelinians again wavered, fell back, rallied again, swarmed upon the first line of works only to go down in scores of hundreds of thousands, a fourth time they were beaten back, rallied, swept to the assault again, reaching the first line of works in the face of murderous canister and grape, the torn, tottered, and bleeding line with their dead piled in windrows withdrew, only to again rally and rush to the assault like

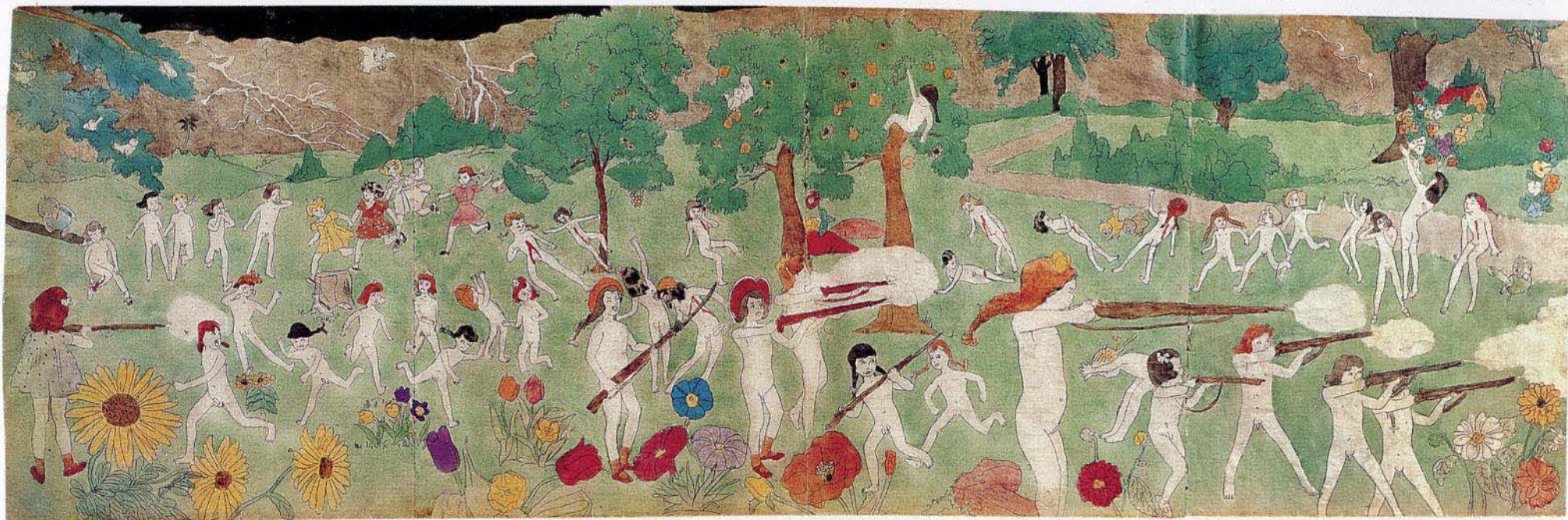
a whirlwind, a tempest of canister and musketry fire withering their many waves, a sixth time they rallied, sweeping within a hundred feet of the position, as far even as the second breastworks like a whirlwind of flaming flesh and steel pouring over the bodies of their dead and dying comrades in the face of a withering roar of artillery and musketry that again seemed to stun heaven and earth ...

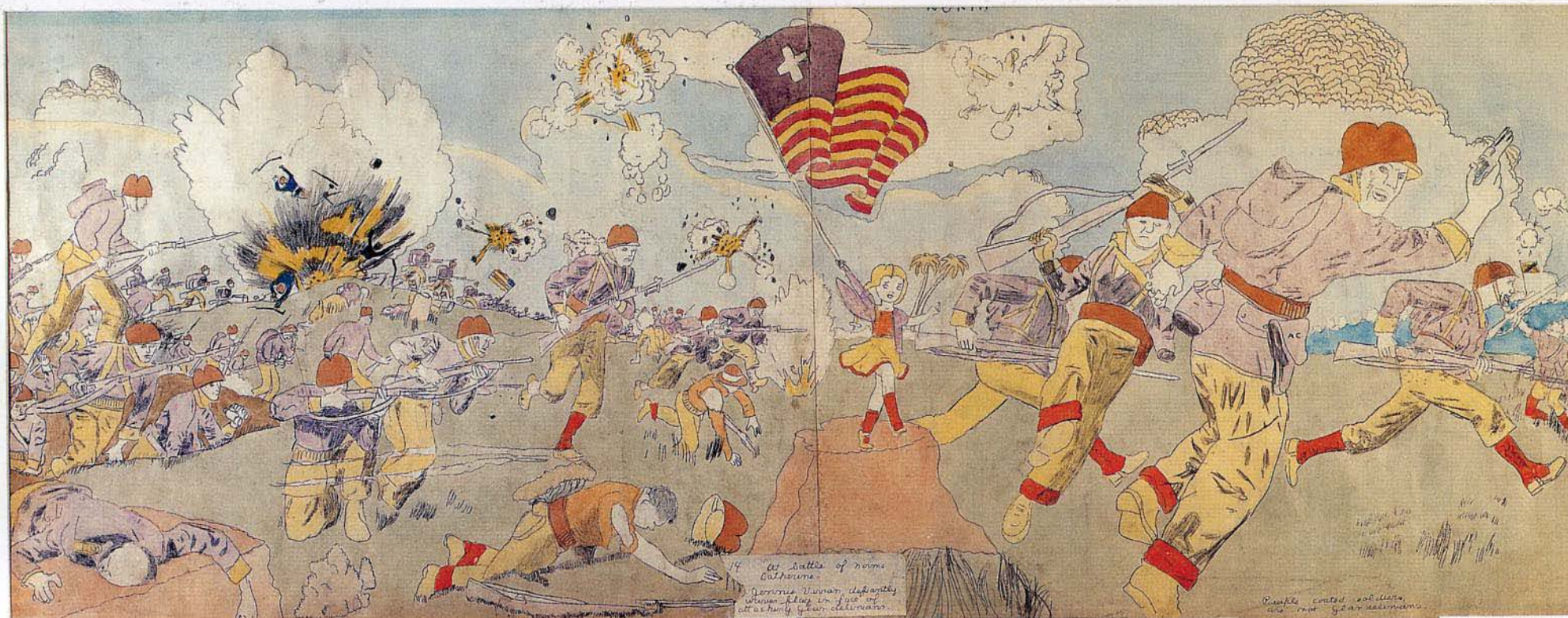
Through all the battle's din, more piercing than the screaming shells, crash of musketry, could be heard the dying sorrows of countless shell racked bodies, the shrieks and groans of hundreds of thousands of dying martyrs, the groans of millions of wounded christians, curses and blasphemies of wounded and dying Glan-delinians the cry of agonized despair, the cry of death being everywhere heard, thousands upon scores of thousands crawling about between hulls, blood blinded, pain maddened, with side of bodies shot to pieces, entestines protruding, with arms or legs, parts of heads and abdominal walls shot off. Such revolting scenes filled the Vivian Girls with horror.⁷⁹

4.10

Henry Darger

Unfitted [Battle scene during lightning storm. Naked children with rifles]. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 24 x 74 3/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Gift of Nathan and Kyoko Lerner. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.





4.11

Henry Darger

14 At Battle of Norma Catherine. Jennie Vivian defiantly waves the flag in face of attacking Glandelinians. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil and carbon on paper. 18 x 46 1/2 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

In writing of battle, particularly in the early stages, he may have borrowed extensively from histories of the American Civil War in which lengthy reconstructions of specific battles played a major part.⁸⁰ Based on the individual accounts of participants, these detailed, often horrific descriptions of battlefield experiences tended to be painfully realistic. Darger was particularly drawn to personal accounts of overwhelming, truly traumatic conditions on the battlefield, descriptions of physical mutilation and terrible death. Later he learned to write of such experience on his own, adding to mere realism subjective elements of the irrational and bizarre, reflective of mental states remote from the field of battle or the reality of war.

In *The Realms* children rarely participate in actual battle — that is the work of adults. However, it is apparent that his personal vision of war required children as witnesses, as victims, and even occasionally as fighters (4.10). His war was staged for children not only with the goal of liberating the child slaves, but, in a deeper sense, in order to immerse the child participants in a world torn to pieces by natural disasters and inhuman violence. Darger's vision is of children living amidst monstrous, emotionally overwhelming conditions. But, by introducing them as helpless victims, by portraying them against the backdrop of an unending civil war, he slowly changed the nature of war itself, allowing us to see it, at times, through the eyes of its innocent child victims.⁸¹ This is particularly apparent in the illustrations which often appear as if they were drawn for an audience of children. When he came to illustrate war, he almost invariably introduced children to the field of battle — a profoundly unrealistic innovation. He needed to imagine them in the midst of chaos

exposed to all the dangers of war, forced to dodge bullets and shells with the courage and resourcefulness of adult soldiers. At the same time, his portrayal of war grew increasingly childlike and playful, with color used to conceal or deny the horror of which he had written so convincingly.

On the one hand, he wished to suggest the helplessness and vulnerability of naked children exposed to adult violence, and, on the other, through the wild adventures of the Vivian sisters, he was determined to demonstrate children's indestructibility, their extraordinary ability to withstand and to resist brutal exploitation and incomprehensible aggression. Ultimately *The Realms* is a story of children triumphant. Despite the fact that they seldom participate in battle and do not form part of the adult armies, Darger loved to depict armies of children, troops of boy and girl scouts, not in battle, but on display.⁸² "Borrowed" little girls, some of them fashionably attired in Darger-designed uniforms, are set proudly atop elegant race horses, in elaborate formal spectacles of military pomp and circumstance. Posing as if for a group portrait, with standards erect and flags flying, these self-conscious little heroines embody his conception of child rebellion, and of the power of little children in revolt against exploitation and persecution by evil adults. It is the omnipresence of children in *The Realms* which shifts Darger's vision of war from history to allegory, and from external to internal reality. Was he conscious of this shift? Probably not.

The Battle of Norma Catherine

Given the hundreds of battles which occur in *The Realms*, many of them merely a pretext for the invention of an outlandish name (Santa Anna Claus, Tantermergo, Cucuecumbier Hundreds), it is not surprising that most of them are described in a page or less. However, the truly significant encounters between the forces of good and evil go on for many days, inundating the reader in what, in a more normal history, would be an unbearable, all but unreadable, avalanche of descriptive detail. The accounts of major battles (Glorinia, Francis Atlanta, Logan Zoe Rae Run, and the siege of Vivian Wickey), because of their length, usually more than a hundred pages, cannot be readily presented in the context of this discussion of Darger's war. It is essential, however, that we explore at least one important battle, briefly comparing its depiction in written and pictorial form. For this purpose I have selected the Battle of Norma Catherine, which we have already encountered in a picture bearing that name (4.11).

The city of Norma Catherine plays a vitally important part in the story. Darger returns to its history on several occasions; indeed, at one point (in volume five), he contemplated devoting an entire volume to it. Addressing his readers directly, Darger makes a brief statement of intention which is of very special value to us in that he signed and dated it.⁸³ The date, July 26, 1926, is not a fictional date, but the actual day on which this passage in volume five was written. This is one of several direct pieces of evidence providing us with information concerning the writing history of *The Realms*. Stepping out of the narrative for the moment, Darger, as author, reveals his intention "to make

this work as accurate as is in my power." Influenced by the various turn-of-the-century "forewords" he had read, he promises both to "entertain" his reader and to provide "good instructions and inspirations," all in the context of an accurate account of "the Norma Catherine Storm." There is, however, a description of an earlier Battle of Norma Catherine in which we are told how the city fell into the hands of the Glandelinians. It is Darger's presentation of this battle, which occupies twenty-eight pages of volume nine, which I want to examine briefly at this point.⁸⁴

Once Darger has decided a battle is to occur, he plunges at once into the fray. Omitting any consideration of battlefield strategy, he begins to describe the chaotic conditions experienced by soldiers in the midst of battle.

... large columns of Angelinians hiding suddenly sprang up and suddenly poured in a most destructive fire. For a moment the surviving Glandelinians were confused, but their leaders rallied them and ordered them forward. The Glandelinians realized that they were discovered, but there was no use going back now, so the many columns continued to advance determined to drive back the purple lines in the distance.⁸⁵

From the start, victory seems to move back and forth from one side to the other so that the reader is held in constant doubt as to who is winning. A host of unfamiliar officers appear and disappear, and hundreds of thousands of foot soldiers are slaughtered and replaced. There is no real development, little military logic (or English grammar), but much excitement.

The enemy's advance was now relentless and simply tremendous. A withering tempest of bullets and canister was poured upon the graycoats who reached the second line of works which was held by a portion of Blenligan's division and who had by this time discovered the serious disaster to their comrades. At this moment general Stoneheart's divisions met stern and serious resistance, the Glandelinian columns being raked through and through by the terrible fire along the entire christian lines consisting of the left wing but nevertheless the heavy gray columns were sprung upon the christian lines with such impetuousity and fury as to drive them back seemed impossible for the christians to do so. They now suffered terrible losses themselves. Gap after gap was torn in the enemy's lines by the incessant fire along the christian lines but the Glandelinians were reinforced and made titanic efforts to carry the works charging with the fury of desperation.

Yet the whole christian line seemed ablaze and the destruction dealt among the Glandelinian armies was terrible. But soon the Angelinians forces were retiring hastily along the left before the concentrated attack of Manley's immense gray columns and five Angelinian divisions with seven thousand eight hundred wounded being under a most deadly fire of the artillery turned upon them by the Glandelinians fell back toward the main line while the Glandelinian columns along the center and right cleared other works and driving the whole christian line out of their position.

On pressed the assailants toward the main line and it seemed like a miracle that the whole column of Glandelinians survived the keen and sharp musketry fire along the whole of general Vivian's line that swept through their lines with the most deadly effect mowing down thousands per minute ... The fire was so keen and murderous that it mowed the enemy's ranks down by the score of hundreds, and tore hundreds of immense gaps through their entire main line. Shells shrieked all about them and burst in roaring explosions, the minnies moaned in furious concerts and the shrapnell and canister picked out victims by scores of thousands. It was horrible to behold but on went the hundreds of thousands of Glandelinians their ranks dissolving in hundreds after hundreds at every discharge.⁸⁶

At work on the construction of another world, Darger has no need to be selective. Far from merely telling a story, he describes everything, minute by minute, scene by scene, in endless detail. He is not going anywhere. He is in it, lost amidst the storm of battle, looking around in perplexity at the chaos that surrounds him. He describes to us all that his overwhelmed perception is taking in. He writes everything, cuts nothing. All the complexity of the battlefield is present on the page. It is difficult to read, overwhelming to try to understand; and yet viewed from within it is utterly real and gripping. His descriptive language relies only to a limited extent on pictorial imagery. We can perhaps picture the shells which "shrieked all about them and burst in roaring explosions." We are told of the difficulty of seeing what is going

on because sections of the battlefield are obscured by "the thick wreaths of smoke."⁸⁷ Sound too is evoked, particularly the strange "devil yell" of the Glandelinians.⁸⁸

In any battle Darger displays an unsettling interest in the fate of the dead and dying. Given the fact that total losses in this one battle amount to seven million men, the battlefield, even before the conflict is over, is inundated with corpses.

The dead and wounded in gray lay in piles as high as the breastworks themselves ... The conditions of the piles of dead and wounded was appalling. Between the two firing lines the piles of dead and wounded were being torn to pieces by the tempest of shot and shell and canister while many other mounds of dead and wounded within full range of the deadly firing were cut and sliced up by the withering tempest of bullets as it swept over the ground where they had fallen.⁸⁹

AT THE PEAK OF BATTLE it is not unusual for Darger to suddenly introduce the theme of fire, an indication that his excitement has also reached a critical point. Only fire can adequately capture his internal state, and so the surrounding hills begin to burn. On some occasions the enemy resorts to deliberate "fire setting" as a means of ensuring a Christian defeat. We now discover that the Vivian girls are present as witnesses at the Battle of Norma Catherine. They are informed by a messenger of the new danger:

"The enemy are even setting whole woods ablaze to drive back general Vivian's right," continued the soldier. "If they succeed they will be able to rout our whole army, as soon as the terrible battle closes. Look, you can see the glow."

They looked out of the window and saw that the farthest hills to the southwest shone as a dark background against a sheen of lurid light reflected by distant forest fires, also the upper hills were illuminated. They opened the windows and from that distance they could hear volumes of dull thunderous roaring sounds, as if the distant part of the world was bursting to pieces inside.⁹⁰

The description of the battle now undergoes a curious change as Darger becomes obsessed with fire.

There was also a strange roaring and humming sound which came from the direction of the fiery battle lines, and below in the valleys now a regular sea of fire from burning trees was lighting up the scene plainly, the roaring of the Glandelinian fire making a sound as if the whole world was in an uproar, and hundreds of thousands of flashes were also seen undulating along the lines of batteries commanded by Bicknell and Manley ...

The victorious Glandelinians yelled and screamed themselves like millions of screeching demons, and the fire of the Glandelinians and their tumult of bayonets increasing to such an extent that their lines seemed to be endless streams of undulating sheets of fire. The Angelinians strove with the fury of hell to recover the

lost positions, the whole line of battle seemed lighted up with the whole surrounding districts as far as the eye could reach, like a dazzling inferno from the terrible blazes of musketry ...

A great tragedy, something that would decide the tide of battle, was imminent in nature. The air was charged with a warning which no man could read or understand. The very atmosphere was filled with a pungent fog mantle, the moon shining as red as blood, or like a round piece of iron under the smith's hammer, far down on the horizon. Nothing on the trees stirred or moved.⁹¹

Caught up in the wild emotions stirred in him by flames, the battle is simply forgotten as he and the Vivian girls become involved in fighting the vast forest fire. Entire cities are consumed, street by street, building by building, before Darger notices he still has a battle on his hands. He pauses to describe the final outcome of the Battle of Norma Catherine, a major Christian defeat.

Again and again the Angelinians made frantic efforts to force their way up out of the hell and gain a foothold on the enemy's position, but again and again the cruel sheet of lead beat them back and crushed them down, shattered, mangled, and bleeding. From the fury of this contest villiages were blazing and adjacent conflagrations burst among the woods. Ten thousand guns were soon playing on the foe, and general Copyright arriving, general Archiebodd, a christian commander with 988, 893 men was forced to surrender to the Glandelinian commander.



4.12

Henry Darger

The Battle of Norma Catherine, Scene no. 1 [at right]; *The Battle of Norma Catherine, Scene no. 2* [at left]. 22 x 86 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

What a greeting when Archiebodd and the Glandelinian commander met. The Glandelinian commander tall upright, bluff square from the keen blue eyes, broad shouldered with the flash of victory from his keen blue eyes under the helmet, and the glow of good fortune on the fresh young face. The christian bent with weary stoop, his eyes drooping, his lips quivering, bareheaded and disheveled, as the two former enemies clasped hands silently. Archiebodd's handkerchief being at his eyes, and the face of the Glandelinian commander was working with emotion.

"It's a sad occurrence, but things like this occur in war." said the Glandelinian general with emotion. "It would have been better if we had not met in such sanguinary conflict like this."⁹²

The particular significance of Norma Catherine to Darger's story is indicated by the fact that over twenty pictures in the Lerner Collection are illustrations of events occurring in that city.⁹³ Scenes specifically associated with the Battle of Norma Catherine are far less common. Darger's various pictorial renderings of this battle seem, at first, to differ in fundamental ways from the description in the text. In general, he appears to have made little if any effort to make his battle scenes conform to the written description. For the most part, his depictions of battles seem to be generic, with only the label serving to distinguish one battle from another. On several occasions a single collage-drawing features separate inscriptions identifying it as two different battles. In other cases, a single collage-drawing represents various stages in a single battle.

A single three-scene collage-drawing refers specifically to the Battle of Norma Catherine. It represents a more complex situation, in that it is composed of two separate compositions depicting the battle, which are joined together in the middle. These are then followed by a third sheet which depicts an adventure of one of the Vivian girls also at Norma Catherine. Our concern is with the two adjoining battle scenes (4.12). While the two compositions are absolutely consistent in style and color, the subject matter doesn't continue across the break. At right, we have a label identifying the picture as *The Battle of Norma Catherine Scene No. 1*. On the left, another label identifies the picture as *The Battle of Norma Catherine Scene No. 2*. It seems that Darger, by joining the two scenes together, sought to create the impression of a vast battle-field, with separate events occurring at various points on the field.

This curious, somewhat awkward, merging of battle scenes may also have occurred in the written text, where Darger appears to have conflated two different battles. The first part, pages 1804-11, identified as chapter 1, has been inserted between chapters 42 and 43. Then, the battle appears to continue in chapter 43, though the page numbers now read 1690-1710. It appears probable that two distinct written descriptions of battles, only one of which was the Battle of Norma Catherine, have been juxtaposed by Darger.⁹⁴ Thus, even the written battles are sufficiently indistinguishable that they can be moved about and combined with other battles without causing too great confusion.

In the collage-drawing, Scenes No. 1 and 2 have both suffered extensive losses along their right and left edges, before being joined. Despite the obvious interruption at the center, the joined fragments function as a more or less continuous battle scene.⁹⁵ The landscape setting is extremely simple: a grassy plain extending back to distant blue-black hills which stretch along the curve of the horizon. The sky is a hauntingly luminous gray-green, spottily disturbed by the characteristic dark-gray radial forms resulting from exploding shells. Only at the left do we see massive inky clouds suggestive of distant forest fires.

It would seem that this is an early collage-drawing, predating Darger's discovery of techniques of enlargement. The composition is unusual because of its scattered, almost random, distribution of numerous small figures. More than other battle scenes it suggests the chaos and confusion of battle. This is particularly true of the right side, where (at left) we see a small number of Christian soldiers trudging forward over the bodies of fallen Glandelinians. Of particular interest is Darger's use of reserved areas of white to suggest smoke drifting across the field of battle, and partly concealing groups of men in the distance. This may be intended as the pictorial equivalent of the "thick wreaths of smoke" obscuring the advancing columns of gray described in the text. Darger has introduced dense clouds of smoke and debris at the center of his composition to separate the opposed forces. A single mounted Christian soldier, his saber raised in the air, may also relate to the text, which speaks of General Vivian as "the only mounted general in sight."

The right-hand side of the composition (Scene No.1) is unique among Darger's battle scenes in depicting violent physical engagement. The complex arrangement of small figures here is far more disorganized and difficult to read. Many more figures are partially obscured by clouds of smoke, or by discrete puffs from discharging muskets. But it is clear that forces from both sides are in violent combat, with rifles, bayonets, and even fists, actively in use. Several bombs are exploding at ground level, with erupting streams of flame and debris carefully defined. One of these fiery explosions occurs in a group of trees, perhaps hinting at the source of the forest fires which will soon compete in violence with the battle.⁹⁶ Despite the relatively small number of participants, a factor which contributes to the picture's naiveté, Darger has succeeded in evoking quite exactly the flavor of his written text, with its similar emphasis on precise detail and chaotic disorganization. Though not immediately identifiable as the Battle of Norma Catherine, the picture does seem to conform, to a surprising extent, to the text it claims to illustrate.

In only one detail does it depart from that text as written. At the Battle of Norma Catherine, the Vivian girls play a brief but important part. At the height of the battle they receive a message from their father.

"I was also sent to ask you little girls a favor," said the soldier. "General Vivian is going to mass some of his strongest batteries on the ridges occupied by the Glandelinians ... he wishes you little girls who are able for continued service to help him maintain his right with the means of your signal boy scout corps ... He wants you little girls to do the work in person

with the boys, and he wants you to come before it is too late ... He depends on you little girls to make it a success, and to save the christian army from utter defeat. I have to bring him your answer."⁹⁷

While, in the picture, the Vivian girls dashing through the battlefield (at right), with giant flag flying, might be thought to be signaling something specific, the label states that *Jennie Vivian defiantly waves the flag in face of attacking Glandelinians*. Her flag-waving sister, in Scene No. 2, is described as escaping marvelously. In the text, it is actually boy scouts who do the signaling, and with colored lights, not flags. The flag-waving little girls are more likely to have been introduced in the picture simply to suggest the courage and daring of children in battle, and the absolute fearlessness of the Vivian sisters in the face of adult aggression.

Not uncommonly, the Vivian princesses do find themselves in the midst of battle. Their supposed helplessness provokes the enemy's rage. Frequently they are cornered or captured by the enemy, thus necessitating rescue operations on the part of the Christian forces. Surprising numbers of soldiers die in these desperate efforts to extricate the little heroines from capture or death. These senseless heroics are, strangely, never seen by Darger as in any way extravagant. The children's bravery when faced with imminent death is seen as inspiring, with their flag waving under fire calculated to awaken fresh courage on the part of the Christian forces. It is clear that flags possess enormous symbolic value for both sides in the conflict; and they certainly read well in the paintings, adding a splash of drama and color to even the darkest and most unpromising battle scene.

Pictorial Order and Chaos

One of the very finest battle pictures created by Darger commemorates a minor battle with a most impressive name: the Battle of Drosabellamaximillian⁹⁸ [4.13]. This important picture brings us face to face with what I believe is a fundamental issue inherent in Darger's obsessional involvement with war: the dynamic relationship between order and chaos. In the time which elapsed between the creation of the Battle of Norma Catherine (see 4.11) and this collage-drawing, which I believe is considerably later in date, Darger grasped a crucial fact: The depiction of chaos, in battle or elsewhere, is not best achieved through the use of disordered or chaotic pictorial composition. Even in rendering a situation of total confusion, the use of certain principles of pictorial organization is essential. This discovery, while it certainly contributed to making this work one of Darger's most highly ordered, complex, and subtle battle scenes, has implications which extend, as we will see, far beyond picture-making or aesthetics. Nevertheless, let's begin with the subtle balance between order and chaos achieved in this masterful collage-drawing, before confronting the question of a similar balance in Darger's psyche.

The ambitious composition, which extends across two full sheets of paper, depicts a very precise moment in the battle: *Seeing Glandelinians retreating Vivian Girls grasp Christian banners and lead charge against the foe.*⁹⁹ Part of the success of this picture is obviously owed to another artist, from whose work Darger has borrowed, not only many of the individual figures, but entire figural groupings. It is likely that in this case he found either a book of military illustrations, or perhaps a single large

4.13

Henry Darger

At battle of Drosabellamaximillian. Seeing Glandelinians retreating Vivian girls grasp christian banners, and lead charge against foe. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper. 19 x 47 3/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



At battle of Drocabell a million
Seeing of Ardabrians restoring
their girls from Christian Lovers
and last charge against foe

engraving of a battle scene which he was able to cut up and trace. The most important borrowed motif is the double line of troops which extends from the left side of the picture, diminishing systematically in size as it recedes along a diagonal plunging deep into space. The final figures in this long line of marching soldiers are absolutely minuscule. These rows of advancing men with bayonets drawn, organized themselves, also serve to organize the picture surface. To break the monotony of the repeated figures, one of the soldiers is carrying a flag which snaps in the wind. Exactly the same group is traced by Darger a second time toward the center of the composition, thus establishing a powerful rhythmical repeat. Within the space cells thus demarcated, greater military and pictorial disorder is permissible and permitted.

A number of smaller, but carefully chosen, figural groupings have also been borrowed and introduced into Darger's controlled space. The two drummer boys, at center, with their rhythmic beat and identical movements imply yet another organizing principle, sound. It is rare for Darger to include small boys in uniform in any battle scene. His sense of the heroic is best represented by the borrowed equestrian motif of a Christian officer mounted on a magnificently caparisoned white charger. Waving his hat straight ahead as if to urge his men onward, he turns back to speak to the figure striding beside him.

Within these carefully organized parameters, Darger employs a host of seemingly disorganized, falling, and fallen figures, the Christian dead and dying of whom he so often speaks. Although this appears to be a Christian victory, the left-hand side of the picture makes it very clear that war is not conducted without sacrifice. But even this seemingly chaotic field of death is subtly ordered, with the bodies arranged with the careful elegance of a *nature morte*, foreshortened and set on a bare plane which is tilted so as to recede quite precisely back into space. The passage of time is implied by the large figure in the bottom right corner, who is repeated again, directly in front, tipped forward at a 90 degree angle. The body in this downward-facing version is partly dismembered. The severed leg and carefully painted blood are pure Dargerian fantasy.

The left side of the composition differs dramatically from the right, in that the emphasis on spatial recession, which is the central organizing principle of the scene we have been examining, is replaced by clouds of white smoke so thick as to obscure all sense of depth. The pictorial contrast between closed and open space is clearly Darger's own invention. A carefully studied sequence of dancing Vivian girls is arranged along a curve which runs parallel to the picture plane, thus implying little movement in depth. Skipping lightly through the battlefield, the seven little girls don't appear to be in any danger. Beautifully decked out in matching Christian uniforms, they seem to be performing a spontaneous but ordered dance amidst the sprawling corpses of the fallen Glandelinians. Full of energy, they are engaged in ceremonially waving enormous flags in front of the clouds that arise from the field of battle.

Also unique to Darger are the severely mutilated bodies of soldiers arranged in a dynamic frieze across the foreground. These bloody figures, depicted with limbs severed, or the entire upper part of the body gone, represent one of the few occasions on which Darger actually illustrates the terrible battlefield casualties which he writes about with such gusto.¹⁰⁰ It is evident that the battle is all but over. The Glandelinians, randomly distributed, but again in a subtle arrangement implying spatial recession, have been decimated. Only in the distance are a few struggling foes still to be seen in hand-to-hand combat.

Organization in this carefully contrived composition extends unmistakably to the restrained color scheme. The decision to cover the ground in subtle tones of off-white allows the figures to be seen with great clarity. Reversing atmospheric perspective, Darger allows the colors to grow deeper and more intense as they move back into space. Curiously brilliant crimson farmhouses and barns, emerald-green trees, and exploding bombs with orange and yellow flames, light up the horizon, contrasting with the indeterminate grays of the sky. Yet, the overall tonality of the picture remains cool, with yellows reduced to pale lemon, and purples verging on blue. The Christian uniforms nevertheless stand out clearly against the white ground. On this occasion, no doubt for purely aesthetic reasons, even the dying Glandelinians sport pale yellow trousers.

Darger's extraordinary design sense is most clearly embodied in the dazzling abstract composition of juxtaposed and flapping flags. Pure theater, the arrangement of intensely colored and patterned banners adds an essential dynamism to what might otherwise be an excessively restrained or understated battle scene. Few artists would risk so many colors, abstract patterns, and symbolic forms colliding in the center of an elaborate figurative composition. Yet, far from appearing disordered or random, the resulting surface design achieves an absolute perfection of frozen movement, with the flag forms locked together as subtly and precisely as the flat pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The Fall of Cities: Vivian Wickey

The American Civil War involved the capture of numerous, supposedly impregnable fortifications, as well as fortified cities with huge civilian populations.¹⁰¹ Darger accordingly included tragic events of this kind in his historical epic. On occasion it seems probable that the fall of a specific Confederate city or fortification has provided a model for a similar incident in *The Realms*, only the names having been changed. As an "inspired" military historian Henry delighted in portraying elaborate fortifications capable of withstanding prolonged enemy assaults or lengthy sieges, in this way setting the scene for their capture. The most impressive fortifications are those which surround the city of Vivian Wickey.

As I have stated in other chapters of the siege of Vivian Wickey one of the principle Glandelinian defenses of Mic-Whirther section was the fortresses of Grance Darling, Marcucian, and Thumbelinia,

a series of heavy works on high banks called Turner Hills eight miles below the region of Vivian Wickey. Here the river was closed with the heaviest piling and hundreds of vessels loaded with heavy material and stones were sunk in the channels near these three fortresses. The work was mostly casemated and mounted with the heaviest kind of guns. They were each of sixty hundred feet in length, and it will be remembered that the Angelinian fleet and land forces once made a desperate assault against the works of Fortress Thumbelinia, but were repulsed. The ships which made the storming attacks by water were unable to elevate their guns sufficiently to reach the Glandelinian works.¹⁰²

It has been possible to identify Darger's historical model in this one case. He is referring to an attack on a very specific set of Civil War fortresses protecting the city of Richmond.

*The Monitor led a flotilla of five gun-boats up the James River. Their captains dreamed of ... running the river batteries and steaming on to level their guns at Richmond. On May 15 [1862] the batteries at Drewry's Bluff seven miles below Richmond stopped the gunboats. The Monitor proved ineffective because her guns could not be elevated enough to hit the batteries on the ninety-foot bluff.*¹⁰³

If we could determine which Civil War historians Darger was reading, we might be able to identify some other quite specific, and possibly extensive, borrowings.

The various attempts to capture these elaborately constructed strongholds, and the city of Vivian Wickey itself, occupy many pages in numerous volumes, with the immense city changing hands more than once.

Vivian Wickey is the largest city in the world, it having over 100,000,000 inhabitants, and covers an area of one hundred miles. It has one billion six hundred million houses of all kinds, and surrounded on the seaboard parts by a series of lines of great fortresses called the Mc-Whirtherian Fortifications.¹⁰⁴

Toward the end of the war the city is in enemy hands. Darger explains:

It is reported [that] through the fault of over-confidence and carelessness, the Calverinians had not guarded the city and its fortifications as well as they should ... thus the enemy had secured a titanic stronghold which proved to be able to hold the very world at bay.¹⁰⁵

Having established the impregnability of Vivian Wickey's defenses, and the strength of the fortresses which guard the approach to the city — Thumbelinia, Gertrude Angeline, Maya, Lucillie Ricksen — he proceeds to document their fall, one by one, in dazzling detail. His account of the siege of Vivian Wickey and its outlying defenses occupies well over a hundred pages of volume twelve (unbound).¹⁰⁶ When the Christians finally attempt to recapture the ruined city, we are in no doubt that a major historical event is underway. Darger's creative forces were certainly equal to the task. Even he, as modest author of *The Realms*, seems to have understood the enormity of the task with which he was confronted. His confidence in his ability speaks for itself:

For these preceding chapters this volume is to show a chronical of the frightful visitation of the fiercer battles, floods, and explosions and shell fire upon the besieged city of Vivian Wickey, which unparalleled calamity occurred in the latter part of the war of the third year, and the author had taken the utmost care to make this fabled record of the worst of the catastrophes of the war as complete as possible in every detail. No expenses have been spared to write down the occurrences. The situation of the stricken sections of the besieged city of Vivian Wickey during the last three months of the siege before its capture is to be portrayed day by day exactly as it could have existed, if it had been true (thank God it was not), and is written in a way that could have outdone the greatest imaginations of any writers ... Nothing is wanting to make this work about Vivian Wickey's downfall reliable and as correct as possible, in short the story of the war's worse center is well and accurately told, of a disaster which has not its like in anywhere in the real world of ours, or like since ever happened in Calverinia itself. Worse than any disaster that ever happened in the Angelinian world.¹⁰⁷

Darger's account of the siege of Vivian Wickey and its ultimate recapture by the Christian forces is necessarily elaborate. The extremely complicated layout of the city, with its separate, but interconnected, subsections, Norma Catherine and Julio Callio, inevitably confuses the reader unfamiliar with the geography of the region. As well, the unusually complex military operations involved in its recapture, and the fact that initially only

limited sections of this vast urban center fall to the Christians, present us with intriguing problems. In pure fantasy one expects events of an all or nothing nature, and yet Darger's description traces the movements of the Glandelinians as they withdraw, step by step, from Norma Catherine, retreating into the stronger defenses of Julio Callio. It is only many pages later that we are told of "the peculiar and astonishing way Vivian Wickey was finally abandoned by the enemy."¹⁰⁸

Vivian Wickey was finally captured, and when the news was heard the whole world rejoiced in a manner that would take a thousand volumes like this to describe ... It was one of the greatest victories in the war, and well noted for the commander who won it, General Concentinian Aronburg, after two months of horrible fighting.¹⁰⁹

THE FALL OF ANY CITY in *The Realms*, by whatever means, was for Darger merely a pretext permitting him to indulge his real passion, the endlessly detailed description of catastrophic destruction and human suffering in a situation of unbearable emotional intensity. In cases where cities fall to the Glandelinians, their capture is followed immediately by a bloodbath, the unleashing of violence that is both pathological and perverse. Some of Darger's most extreme accounts of inhuman brutality are found in his descriptions of the torture and massacre of the adult and child inhabitants of captured cities. An example is the massacre that follows upon the capture of the city of Genitori (see pp. 567-569). We will examine the nature and implications of this particular form of mass violence in chapter 11. However, once the enemy forces have withdrawn (or where a city is retaken by the Christian side, as at Vivian Wickey), Darger's

obsessional interest in the results of cataclysm surfaces, as he begins a street by street, situation by situation, examination of a city and a civilization in collapse. Endlessly detailed accounts of this kind are found throughout *The Realms* and, indeed, long after his book had been completed he continued to explore similar subjects in his later work, *The History of My Life*. It is clear that an irrational force, over which he had little or no control, motivated this compulsive preoccupation with a world destroyed. Vivian Wickey, after its recapture, provides a typical example of the nature of his concerns. He begins with Homeric detachment, which is soon overwhelmed by the inferno engendered by his excited vision of death and destruction.

Never before had the following day's sun risen upon such a sight of the siege, and as though unable to endure it, the hot god of the day soon veiled his face behind the dull and leaden smoke clouds of big fires, and hardly ever shined. And surely it was enough to draw the tears even from the inanimate things, but it was the horrible fate of rebellion ...

Starting through the ruined town of Norma Catherine as soon as the flood waters caused by both sides combined began to recede that following morning, a large number of relief parties began the work of rescuing the Angelinian wounded soldiers and dying from the ruins of buildings at which they fell while battling the dogged enemy. The scenes here presented were almost beyond any description. Thousands of screaming women bruised and bleeding, many of them bearing the lifeless forms of children of all ages in their arms, men broken hearted and even

sobbing, bewailing the loss of their wives and children, or cursing the enemy and filling the air with imprecations against them, streets filled with floating rubbish, among which were many bodies of the dead soldiers of the battle, constituted part of the most awful picture of the war. In every direction as far as eye could even reach, the scene of desolation and death continued. It certainly was enough to cause the stoutest heart to quail and grow sick, and yet the searchers and surviving Angelinian soldiers well knew they could not unveil one hundred or one third part of the misery the destructive fire of both sides had purposely or accidentally brought about ... It was a butchery without precedent, a gathering of victims that was so ghastly as to be beyond the power of any man or artist to dare picture if he could.¹¹⁰

Certain subjects recur with monotonous regularity: for example, an obsessional involvement with the bodies of the dead, and the difficulties involved in disposing of them.

No one among the very inhabitants of Norma Catherine seemed sane, for there was madness in the very air. All moved in an atmosphere of great gloom, it was even difficult to move and breathe with such death on all sides, and yet no one even among the soldiers could keep their eyes off the terrible scene, of those horrible fascinating corpses of dead of both sides. They riveted the gaze, and life and death were often so closely intermingled they could not be told apart. It was the apotheosis of the frightful.¹¹¹

When I left the ruined city, the stench of decaying human flesh or bodies was simply terrible, and almost unbearable. It was indeed with the greatest difficulty that they could be handled at all, and the only ones who dared to do the work were soldiers. The sight was more sickening than any one could have believed, and it is impossible to make any efforts at identification of so many dead, except to keep a record of the weapons and valuables taken from the bodies. All attempts at holding inquests were abandoned. The bodies were piled on immense drays and hauled to the warfs, where they were lowered into the water. They were piled one on the other like so many dead animals, it being impossible to give them any attention. The bodies of the poor and rich alike were treated in this manner. Thousands of soldiers, hundreds of dead non-combatants and women were found this way, and soldiers and relatives of all kinds who are among the missing surround the bodies, or the places where the many bodies were being taken or handled, and their cries of distress were or are almost unbearable.¹¹²

A puzzling phenomenon typical of Darger's involvement with the dead is his tendency to juxtapose corpses and other objects in a kind of surreal still-life composition, a tendency which can also be observed on rare occasion in his pictorial oeuvre.

In the immense piles of debris along the main streets, in the waters of the river itself, and scattered throughout the resident portions of Norma Catherine, were to be found masses of wreckage, and in these most great piles were to be found more human bodies, and household furniture of every description. Most of the bodies were dead soldiers of both sides please.¹¹³ Even many handsome pictures were seen lying alongside of ice cream freezers, and resting beside the nude figure of some dead soldier or non-combatant.¹¹⁴

Unique to Darger's vision is the invention of a peculiar phenomenon associated with ruined cities and their inhabitants, the concealed presence among them of spies, or "Glandelinian ghouls," who prey on the bodies of the dead and dying.

In one day over one thousand spies or Glandelinian ghouls were shot, and no mercy was shown the daring Glandelinian vandals who came within the christian lines to rob or murder the wounded soldiers ... Most of the Glandelinian spies were Zimmermannians, and when executed were found loaded with spoil, important papers wrenched from officers, maps, plans, jewelry and other articles. Not only had these fiends robbed the lowest of the Angelinian officers, but they mutilated those they killed when resisted, in many instances disemboweling them in order to show their merciless ferocity to those who dared oppose their purpose.¹¹⁵

The activities of these ghouls, to which Darger returns again and again, seem to allow him more intimate possibilities of approach to the bodies of the dead. His description of Glandelinians, including enemy boy and girl scouts, despoiling corpses — cutting off hands and feet, fingers or ears — becomes quite irrational. Particularly surprising is his admission that their attacks on adult male bodies include the ritual act of cutting open the abdomen and disemboweling the victim. As we will see later, Darger's pathological obsession with the murder and gutting of children, principally little girls, is to be found throughout *The Realms*. That it extends to assaults on the bodies of officers, and other adult victims of the siege, is an unusual admission.

A second concern of Darger's is his strange preoccupation with the psychology of victims. This too appears with absolute regularity, and almost standard phrasing. He is particularly struck by the strange lack of emotion seen in survivors of catastrophe, which sometimes alternates with violent extremes of emotional reaction. He describes "surviving people loyal to Angelinia [as] apathetic, dejected, heart broken and full of dread," and asks why,

after the strain was over, and Norma Catherine was in possession of the Angelinians, and all her land, fortifications, and works, and all was quieted down, and the strain was over and all danger from battle and foe gone, reason should be finally unseated and men women and children by thousands break into the unmeaning gayety of the maniac?¹¹⁶

In an effort to restrain his own ghoulish enthusiasm and to regain control, Darger's passionate description of ruined cities with their dead and living victims (which in most cases goes on for dozens of pages) alternates with his equally bizarre, abstract preoccupation with numbers. This involves precise accounting: totals of the numbers of the dead, of corpses disposed of, the extent of financial losses of property and crops, estimates of the cost of reconstruction, etc., juxtaposed with psychological observations.

How many or some of those escaped with their lives. Terrible number of lives lost and property damage sustained outside of Vivian Wickey or Norma Catherine. One million victims and millions of dollars in crops swept away. Great estimates made. Insanity follows frightful sufferings of the poor victims ... Fifty thousand demented ones ...

And then, his standard observation, endlessly repeated: "apparent indifference to the loss of relatives."¹¹⁷

Conflict in The Realms: The Mind at War

At the beginning of this chapter, before we undertook our exploration of various aspects of Henry Darger's fantasy war, we raised the issue of war, in general, as an externalized product of purely internal mental states, an unconscious embodiment of human psychopathology projected outward into the world. Can specific aspects of the complex, irrational, and destructive phenomenon we call "war" be closely matched with specific structures — processes, images, drives, defenses — in the mind? Any serious attempt to answer this question is obstructed by our tendency to see "the making of war" as a politically, economically, and socially explicable occurrence. Inevitably, war appears to us to be an aspect, however undesirable, of external reality. It is easy to rationalize war, difficult to see it consistently as a pure form of psychopathological expression.¹¹⁸ Only when war is an imaginary event, exclusively the product of internal processes, of fantasy run wild, is it perhaps possible to analyze it as a direct expression of internal mental states, of psychic reality. A simple example would be a war occurring in a dream.

In the course of a surgical operation in which he was rendered helpless by an anesthetic, Dr. Paul Federn, a prominent psychoanalyst, reports having a complex war dream in which he appeared as a general and statesman energetically directing the armies of an unidentified nation.

I did not know that I was dreaming. I had not forgotten my antecedent life and felt myself with my own character and name. However I lived in completely changed surroundings and I possessed a strength of will power, quickness and certainty of decision, and intensity of action the like of which I have never experienced before either awake or dreaming.

I was the chief military commander and chief statesman of great territories, and I put in order one province after the other ... The time I seemed to live through while I was strenuously endeavoring to reform these countries was very long; it appeared to last for half a year. I accomplished my task with continuous strain and tension. Everything was decided in a hurry and carried through quickly. I was very severe with myself but at the same time fully and continuously contented with the way I performed my duties. Never in my life have I felt such happiness or satisfaction with my personality and with my work. It was the strongest "feeling of oneself" and the greatest enjoyment of one's own self one can imagine. The singular events of the dream followed each other with enormous speed, all actions were carried out with perfection, one after the other, and in complete order and very quickly, since it seemed necessary to act as quickly as possible during the whole dream. Life was a glorious and victorious fight without any conceit or show."¹¹⁹

In his interpretation of the dream Federn emphasizes, not the liberation of unconscious aggression in battle, but the compensatory experience of omnipotence and control. In a situation of powerlessness, his urgent wish was to be massively, and personally, in charge, though not necessarily as a general on the field of battle. Indeed he points

out: "Although I was chief of armies, it was no military fight; my personality conquered by its own strength and by the height of my position."¹²⁰

The many functions of war in Darger's internal economy are, of course, far more complex, his prolonged involvement with warfare infinitely more real to him, than the transient experience of a dream. Nevertheless, these two subjective experiences of war have significant elements in common, in particular the need for personal control in otherwise frightening situations of helplessness and vulnerability.

It is natural to assume that war's chief psychological function is to provide for the expression of suppressed aggressive, even murderous, drives in the psyche, forgetting the extent to which warfare has been structured and formalized, its conventions and rules approximating those of an elaborate social ritual. This was particularly the case with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wars which provided the model for Darger's idealized conception of war. His imaginative accounts of battle were not by any means his primary outlet for the explosive aggressive and sadistic drives which threatened at times to overwhelm him (see chapters 9 and 11 below). As author of *The Realms* he sought to demonstrate his mastery of war: his interest in planning and logistics, his abilities in battlefield layout and strategy, and in the systematic reporting of events in the field. His private war allowed for some of the more organized and organizing functions of his personality. To a considerable extent, Darger's battles provide an

occasion for the display of intellect rather than aggression; of ego function rather than id. While conflict, violence, and death are certainly present, it is the struggle to achieve and to maintain control that these endlessly recurring displays of ritualized violence chiefly represent. In this context, it is obviously of importance that for much of the work the Christian forces are at risk, overwhelmed by the power of evil.

Fantasy provided Henry, as a boy in a situation of utter passivity and helplessness, with a means of refuting the general belief that there was something the matter with his mind, that his intellect was damaged. However, the seeds of self-doubt had been planted early, too early ever to be successfully removed. Throughout his life, Darger responded to the tragic and continuing tendency of his environment to misperceive and to misunderstand him by retreating ever more deeply into fantasy. He corrected the distorted picture of his existence, not by challenging the world, but by engaging in a dialogue with himself, secretly demonstrating his astonishing abilities to an audience of one.

The Glandelinian enemy would seem to have been called into existence early in his life as symbolic representatives of a real adult menace, the grownups who controlled the institutions in which he spent his boyhood. He depicts them as child-slave owners who exploit and abuse the children in their care. What is not certain is whether, already in childhood, his struggle with them assumed the character of an imaginary war fought in the Realms

of the Unreal. When, later, the Glandelinians were portrayed as depraved monsters, their bizarre attacks on children clearly reflect a wide range of sadistic and murderous impulses derived from Darger's own repressed sexuality and rage. Much later in our study we will investigate the connections between Darger's internal violence and his vision of Glandelinian perversity. At present, however, our concern is exclusively with the atheistic Glandelinians as the natural enemy of the Christians. For Darger war was an essentially male affair, with men killing men. On the battlefield the behavior of these enemies of God and mankind is not notably worse than that of their Christian opponents. In emulation of the American Civil War Darger portrays both sides with remarkable objectivity, even describing some of the good qualities of the foe, in particular their courage. As a result of this "historical" restraint, only a limited range of his own internal violence could find expression on the battlefield, or through war. We should be aware, nevertheless, that the civil war which splits the Realms of the Unreal from top to bottom is reflective of a similarly massive split in Darger's psyche, and of a profound internal schism in Darger's perception of self that was never fully resolved.

The pain of being damaged and different seems never to have left Darger. He was reminded of it each day in his dealings with others. When the accusation surfaced again, in the army and in the hospitals in which he worked, he had only his creative activity to secretly challenge and correct reality. As we have seen, his private war was invented, or perhaps renewed, in order to compensate for the loss of the real war in Europe from which he had been forcibly excluded. The Darger who we will encounter in the next chapter, chief

officer of the Gemini, and admirer from a distance of the Vivian sisters, as well as the very different Henry J. Darger, author of *The Realms*, were both totally unlike the child-man who lived and labored in Chicago. Both as author, and as active participant in *The Realms*, Darger's chief business was war. Writing was itself a means of waging war, though only in silence, alone in his room. In war he became the man he desired to be, a heroic fighter in the Realms of the Unreal. Henry readily accepted the various rationales for war, as did his church. As long as the cause was just, the spirit patriotic, war was acceptable.

The ongoing war that is *The Realms* represented a lifelong demonstration of his real identity: his strength of intellect, his creative power, his organizational ability, his masculine force, his adult stamina, determination, and energy. In this respect, Darger proved his case to an extent which surpassed anything he could have comprehended or desired. The endless battles of *The Realms* involve the marshaling of a flood of imagery, the organization of what would otherwise have been internal chaos. Reporting nightly from the field of battle also permitted him to establish a new identity carved out of war, that of disciplined writer and historian. For Captain Henry Darger, leader of the Gemini, an occasional general leading his men in battle, war also provided heroic action and excitement in a life uniquely deprived of both.¹²¹ There is a baroque exuberance and richness in Darger's vision of warfare that contrasts dramatically with his marginal existence in the world. At the same time, paradoxically, the obsessional, undeniably laborious, task of preparing his long and detailed reports from the battlefield calmed his excitement by regularly draining at least some of his powerful aggressive

impulses and sexual energy. These blow-by-blow accounts must have exhausted Darger just as they exhaust the reader. Of all the narrative elements of *The Realms*, they are the most difficult to read, the least rational and coherent as writing. It is possible that part of their unconscious function was defense, with this war uniquely designed to restrain rather than to provoke aggressive impulse. This paradox was probably already present in his boyhood response to the American Civil War.

AS WILL BECOME increasingly apparent in later chapters, Darger made extensive, though unconscious, use of some of the more primitive, yet functional, means of psychic defense, in particular, splitting and projection.¹²² Large portions, eventually almost all, of his "self" was split off, removed from consciousness. Projected into *The Realms*, these disguised aspects of his internal reality ceased to form part of his identity. The damaging result of this internal defensive strategy was, of course, Darger's failure to develop or to mature. Deprived of vast portions of his inner world (imagery and impulse), and of outer experience (memory), he came to resemble the limited child-man who others perceived him to be. It seems quite certain that he knew nothing of his own violent sexual and aggressive drives, nor did he ever grasp the connection between the sadistic and murderous behavior of the Glandelinians and his own wishes. Enamored of small children, and unaware of ambivalence, he could have no understanding of the motivations underlying Glandelinian violence or cruelty. All he was conscious of was the suffering of children.

The forlorn faces of little children embittered my heart against the foe like cold steel. I hate the Glandelinians. I wish they were in H ... excuse me but you know what I mean ... the overflowing tears in their eyes, the quiver of their lips. When I know this is caused by the enemy, it brands me like a hot iron. Also the brand of agony was upon their faces, and despair was written across their hearts.¹²³

As a result of an ongoing and massive expenditure of psychic energy, the personal nature of his drives and fantasies remained permanently and completely cut off from his perception of self. Only explosive outbursts of rage (tantrums), directed chiefly at God, troubled his existence and inspired occasional feelings of guilt, particularly in later life. For the most part, the success of his unconscious defensive operations enabled him to remain free of conflict and, indeed, sane in the presence of overwhelming forces which would otherwise have ensured his destruction.

What is curious, however, is that the unconscious but omnipresent violently opposed tendencies in his psyche found abstract expression in the war that troubles the Realms. Internal conflict, of which he was largely free, is embodied in the titanic struggle between Christians (Catholic morality) and the Glandelinians (Glands, pure instinct, evil unrestrained). "How in the world should I try to describe it? Will the world ever know the real dimensions of this disaster of the war."¹²⁴

A SECOND MAJOR AREA of split-off psychic content projected into *The Realms* as an aspect of war derived from Darger's early childhood. It involved the traumatic experience of the loss of his mother and sister and, somewhat later, of his home and his relationship to his father.¹²⁵ More precisely, it embodies the vast darkness that descended upon him at that time, obscuring all memory, and obliterating his ability to feel. This experience is symbolized most clearly, both in *The Realms* and in *The History of My Life*, by overwhelmingly destructive tornadoes that, with extreme suddenness, destroy much of the world. The destructive nature of this tragic sequence of events in the life of a small boy would have remained obscure were it not for their disguised embodiment in a number of important aspects of *The Realms*. Darger was compelled, over and over again throughout his life, to portray situations of terrifying destructive force, of cataclysm, accompanied by human pain of unlimited extent. Indeed, his obsessional preoccupation with cataclysm, in nature and war, is so extensive and intense that it can only be compared to schizophrenic delusions of the end of the world.¹²⁶ War is used by Darger, as we have seen, simply to provide endless possibilities of horror: battlefields covered in the dead and dying, fallen cities overwhelmed by human suffering and deprivation, death and madness. If his descriptions of battle seem relatively orderly and controlled, his agonizing portrayals of battlefields and cities decimated by war invariably involve a loss of proportion and control, with disturbing evidence of incoherence and irrationality evident throughout. Some of Darger's suppressed madness surfaces in these harrowing accounts of civilization destroyed. On rare occasion, memory seems about to erupt into consciousness, though this never actually seems to have occurred.

More sorrowful and heart rending still was the sight of the sullen morose faces of so many brigades of wounded soldiers, the tear stained faces of women refugees half clad who looked listlessly from the windows of the few remaining barracks, haunted by the memory from which they can never escape, the loss of children, and priceless articles torn from them by battle crazed, war mad Glandelinians, or of seeing their families hurled into a horrid maelstrom of destruction to be seen no more on the earth. And yet what were all those dismantled army barracks to the countless thousands of dismantled hearts within?¹²⁷

The children who play such a fundamental role in *The Realms* appear throughout against a backdrop of war and natural disaster, skipping gaily through a world gone mad. Amidst the terrifying violence of the adults at war, surrounded on all sides by nature run amok, their innocent faith troubled by the mystery of a passive and uncaring God, the children somehow manage to survive. Their strength and their survival was perhaps the fundamental point of his story. All unknowing, Darger was compelled to inflict on the world of his imagination his personal childhood experience of cataclysm, and to place the Vivian girls and the other children in the midst of it.

I would surely rather plunge a dagger through my heart than endure this awful experience again. I long, I crave for revenge. The readers of all these harrowing news of the papers of this disaster put into newspapers must pardon the personal nature of my own narrative. I cannot help

it. It would be utterly impossible to write without becoming part of this sad story myself.¹²⁸

Strangely, writing of this darkness, this apocalyptic horror, seems to have kept it at bay. Projected into *The Realms of the Unreal*, Darger's early and overwhelming experience of agony too great to be borne remained completely split off from consciousness, safely removed from memory and feeling, postponed until the final cataclysm at the end of the world. It is in these accounts of conditions in a world destroyed that one most clearly sees war as a mental state, a pure embodiment of otherwise invisible terror and anguish.

In a curious passage, Darger irrationally interrupts what has been a brief soliloquy on the horrors of war, to speak of a beach on the shore of the Sunbeam Creek. His poetic image of a wounded dove fluttering down from the sky to rest on the snowy white sand of the beach seems to encapsulate memories of an innocent time at the beginning of his life, before disaster struck. The wounded dove a symbol of disturbed innocence; the shining white beach perhaps reflective of consciousness still unclouded, a mind intact.

How in the world should I try to describe it? Will the world ever know the real dimensions of this disaster of the war, which crushed the fighting Christian forces at Delights Junction and left them broken and most disconsolate and discouraged like a wounded dove or sea gull fluttering on the sandy beach of the ocean.

And the small but beautiful beachy shore of the Sunbeam Creek or river near

Delights Junction? That once most beautiful river beach, with its long stretches of strangely but unusually snowy white sand, where long before the war the country children used to come to play — what in the world had become of it? Horribly misshapen, unusually and strangely distorted, blotched beyond comprehension and drabbed and horribly crimsoned, and wreckage and body strewn, it spread away to the north and the south, its ugly scars and shell holes and craters made by explosions rendered more hedious by the glinting rays of the winter sun.¹²⁹

Anticipatory Visions

As the writing of *In the Realms of the Unreal* proceeded, over the course of many years, there was a slow but undeniable increase in violence, though not necessarily of violence on the battlefield. The mounting destructive frenzy must reflect shifts in Darger's internal economy, and in his ability to contain instinctual drives of unimaginable intensity. While the war continues uninterrupted in volume after volume, it is evident that his need for cataclysm and chaos increased dramatically, to the point that he had to seek other means of unleashing destruction on the inhabitants, and particularly the children, dwelling in his other world. In a curious, quite irrational way, as we will see, nature begins to participate in the war, with fire and flood, earthquakes, storms, and unexplained explosions now an additional source of violence and chaotic disruption (see chapter 8). Many of

these seemingly natural events are, in fact, blamed on the enemy, who sets forests afire, or destroys great dams to unleash vast floods. It is significant that Darger's need for massive destruction and countless deaths surpassed war's cataclysmic potential, or at least the destructive potential of those wars of which he had knowledge, including the First World War. He certainly drew on his knowledge of that war, and in particular on his awareness of the destructive potential of poison gas.

The writing of *The Realms*, though not the task of illustration, was certainly complete well before the onset of the Second World War. Precisely because of this fact, certain events occurring in the later parts of the book, beginning around volume eight, take on particular importance because they present us with inexplicable enormities which anticipate, if not predict, aspects of modern warfare of which Darger could not have known at the time he was writing.¹³⁰ An important example is provided by the cataclysmic explosions which utterly obliterate the city of Abbieann. Volume eight is almost completely given over to Walter Starring's expedition to the ruins of the shattered city. Described as larger than Chicago and New York combined, Abbieann is destroyed in its entirety by an instantaneous blast and fiery inferno which incinerates all of its inhabitants.¹³¹ Nothing is left of the city and its environs, part of which break off and slip into the harbor, though fires continue to burn, and additional explosions erupt from time to time.

Artists will paint, and authors will write of its horrors for many centuries to come. The scene of the disappearing part of the city under the shore of Lake Angeline,

where so many were in their beds and drowned like rats in a trap, is and ever will be considered one of the most dramatic and terrible incidents in the whole history of all disasters.¹³²

Nothing in human experience of warfare known to Darger could possibly account for instantaneous destruction on this scale. No mines, no bombs, could have caused the millions of deaths, the lives snuffed out in an instant, that he describes as occurring at Abbieann. It is more than evident, however, to the modern reader, that Darger, all unknowing, is describing in precise detail, and for hundreds of pages, a vast city wiped out by a nuclear blast. Of course, he could have known nothing of such weapons at the time he was writing, or of what a single bomb dropped on a city such as Hiroshima or Nagasaki could accomplish. These achievements of mankind at war still lay far in the future.¹³³

Death was everywhere, and in its most terrible forms. It seemed as if flashes of fire and clouds of it came down from the sky, killing many who had escaped into the streets. For this great tragedy the settings were wonderful. The countryside before the concussions literally rocked with devastating effects in its agony. From the nearest explosions majestic columns of smoke, apparently inky black, reached skyward, and the scene was for that moment as if craters from the surface of the ground was vomiting incandescent matter that gave forth prismatic lights as it or the fiery cloud rolled over the land, sending great waves of fire over the cities and towns, and such thunder, as had never been hoid by man cracked and rolled through the heavens. From the earth came the most

tremendous detonations on record. These joined with the secondary thunder all for those fifteen minutes merging in an incessant roar that added to the panic of the fleeing people who had any chance of escaping.

All this of course lasted fifteen minutes, and the clouds the color of sack-cloth rose to an awful height, mushrooming at the tops, spreading out in dense clouds that descended and spread far and wide to bring night at late morning. For hours the atmosphere had been so laden with powder gases that life was made almost impossible. It is believed that many of those who escaped from their falling houses were suffocated by this gas before they were touched by the fiery cloud ... For fifteen minutes, by the concussion of the explosions, the earth quaked incessantly and most violently, the very mountains shook and caused terrific landslides, and so terrible were the thunders that it had seemed to the terrified that the universe was being rent to pieces.¹³⁴

What would seem to have occurred is that Darger's internal need for destructive upheaval inspired an imaginative vision in him of what could and would inevitably come to pass if similar needs erupted in the minds of others and in the real world. Similarly, his fantasies concerning the perverse impulses of the Glandelinians, their unrestrained drive to torture and kill millions of innocent children (at one point he mentions six million victims), anticipates with disturbing exactitude the irrational madness of the Holocaust, though in Darger's vision the victims of the systematized extermina-

tion are Christians rather than Jews.¹³⁵ As will become more than apparent in later chapters, the enormity, the sheer intensity and extent, of the internal destructive forces with which Darger played in imagination cannot be overestimated or even comprehended. The violent sadistic and aggressive drives which he contained and manipulated in *The Realms of the Unreal* were real enough. Unleashed in reality on an unsuspecting world, their effects would be, and were, as horrendous as Darger imagined. In this sense, the vision of war he embodied in *The Realms* is disturbingly prophetic, sickeningly real. Darger was not aware that his writings might in any sense anticipate the future. He did see very clearly, however, that the manmade cataclysmic events he was describing surpassed anything known or possible.

... fantastic effects were produced upon the surface of the earth, which they said gives the observer the feeling that he is on some strange planet still in the forming stage ... The series of great explosions around or near Abbieann, who or which according to witnesses this time played havoc such as never was witnessed for reality, or never recorded in truth historical facts with the face of the earth and the habitations of men. Likely no earthquake in any annals of science ever could have changed the physical geographical conditions of any land as did in this story happen to the physical geography of the affected region of the Calverinian lands to the extent of the Abbeian cataclysm.¹³⁶

Given the extent of Darger's portrayal of human violence, and his intuitive and unconscious perception of human perversity and rage, his decision to conceal his writings from the world becomes understandable. Such things could only be tolerated, or spoken of, in the Realms of the Unreal. It also seems possible that the long years of confronting these drives emerging from within ultimately satisfied something in Darger, or, alternatively, that increasing age first augmented, but then diminished, the intensity of his lust and rage. Nevertheless, Darger's preoccupation with violence and massive destruction persisted to the end of his life, with uncontrolled nature and human evil still productive of terrifying disturbances in both the natural and the moral orders.

Once the war in *The Realms* was brought to a conclusion, he ceased entirely to write of war. With the completion of his great book, he also abandoned any real involvement with the Realms of the Unreal. While the Vivian girls continued for a time to exist, their adventures now took place not in another world, but in the Chicago of Darger's boyhood. In his later writings, various kinds of catastrophes disrupt cities, both real and imaginary, in the state of Illinois. Darger's imagination circled to the end of his life around images of cataclysm and human suffering. While he continued to function as a newspaperman, witness to horrendous events, and teller of stories, his work as a historian of war came to an end with the final volume of *The Realms*.

Christian Victory and the End of the War

From a psychological standpoint it is difficult to account for the internal shifts which allowed Darger to bring his involvement with the Realms of the Unreal to an end. A more typical author writes with a goal in mind, a finished book; but Darger's idiosyncratic immersion in fantasy, and his compulsive involvement with writing, would not seem to have permitted a conclusion, or an escape, other than death. Given the chaotic disarray of the manuscripts, and the confusion in the numbering of the unbound volumes, it was impossible in the early years of study to discover whether the vast work did in fact end. Darger, however, always insisted that the war would end, indicating that it was destined to last exactly four years and seven months. Ultimately it became apparent that he had kept his promise. The final events in the drama unfold in volume thirteen (unbound).¹³⁷ The awkward progress of this enormous final volume, in which Christian military victory is achieved in a way that is best characterized as "one step forward, two steps back," reveals the extreme difficulty, indeed ambivalence, experienced by Darger in extricating himself from the war that is *The Realms*. That he did so does not, however, imply the end of his work as a writer and illustrator. These activities, and the fantasies which powered them, persisted to the very end of his life, with no gaps whatever in his creative activity. Accordingly, the only shift we would seek to understand is the termination of his involvement with war and with the writing of military history.

In the Realms of the Unreal has two conclusions: One, realistic and simple, brings the war to an end; while the other, more mysterious, resolves the great moral conflict between good and evil which has so deeply upset relations between man and God. The first of these "endings" is examined here; the second, which involves supernatural events, in chapter 7.

Throughout volume thirteen Darger was, quite consciously, winding down the war. His obvious reluctance to bring the story to a close resulted in an unusually prolonged final volume, with Christian defeats maintaining the suspense right up to the last pages of the book. The later battles of the war take place on enemy territory, in Glandelinia, with the evil forces putting up a valiant defense of their homeland.

What an occurrence since the christian armies poured into the country of Glandelinia and over ran the whole region for over three hundred miles. The enemy had shown the sternest resistance that was ever expected or experienced during the entire war ... All of the christian armies whether they won battles or lost, were checked ... during these three months, or four months, there had been about 484 battles or over a thousand battles in the whole war entirely. All eyes were turned upon Darger and Evans. If either one of these two were checked, there would be no hopes of conquest and the war would be lost.¹³⁸

Although Darger, as author, wished to leave his audience in doubt concerning which side in the conflict would ultimately emerge victorious, it is apparent that he was arranging for Glandelinian

defeat, despite all his threats to the contrary. To bring this about he allows the Christian forces to indulge in acts of extraordinary violence both against the civilian population and in battle. Of a single Christian victory, the battle of Germaine Fielding, he writes:

No other battle of recent time of the war itself, outside of Glorinia, Frances Atlanta, and Logan Zoe Rae Run, had been so obstinate, so bloody ... The Glandelinian army during this charge lost a greater number in killed and wounded that all the allied armies of England, Germany, and the other nations lost in all the wars that raged in the old country ... the world renowned German Empire just past ... The day had begun in rout and defeat, it ended in a great victory for the christian army.¹³⁹

A clear indication that Darger was consciously bringing his book to a close was his decision to kill off some of the major participants on both sides, including ranking generals who had been present as influential figures throughout the story. Perhaps in emulation of Civil War history, he even allows heroic Christian commanders to meet death on the battlefield. An example is the death of General Wienstien, one of the closest adult friends of the Vivian girls, who abruptly dies in battle.¹⁴⁰ Soon after, the most famous of all of the Christian generals, Concentinian Aronburg, is killed, shot through the heart.¹⁴¹ Darger's ambivalence in thus terminating the activity of this great Christian hero is revealed when General Aronburg turns up, alive and well, some pages later. Without question, the most shocking death in *The Realms* is that of the boy hero Penrod, adopted brother of the Vivian girls. His death in battle is greeted by

the reader with total disbelief, but, in fact, holds (see pp. 273-274). On the Glandelinian side the deaths are now both more numerous and significant, involving all but one of the Manleys, the central triumvirate directing the war on behalf of the enemy. These tragic events are obviously calculated so as to bring the story and the Glandelinian rebellion to an end.

At times it seems that Darger is concerned with punishing evil and imposing his own rough justice. The Vivian girls are occasionally allowed to triumph over their worst enemies. The death of John Manley provides an example.

Manley, seeing who had fired at his men, rushed upon the little girls with a wild curse, and struck poor little Jennie down from her horse with a terrible blow of his saber, wounding her severely and dangerously. He turned to rush Violet but she swept aside, and struck him a blow in the eye with her pistol butt crying "Take that you rascal and enemy of God, John Manley. I hate you you abuser of Our Lord." Blinded by rage he rushed Catherine to strike her down with his sword ... Catherine avoided him, by a rush, and put a bullet neatly between Manley's eyes. He fell down from his horse dead, having been killed instantly.¹⁴²

Some eighty pages later, John's brother, Huebaum Manley, is shot to death in an Abbieannian ambush.¹⁴³ This leaves only the father, Johnston Jacken Manley, to dispose of, but Darger has other plans for him.

For reasons which will only become apparent later in our study, the most significant death on the enemy side is that of General Raymond Richardson Federal, which takes place at the Battle of Germaine Fielding.

Federal fell struck in many places. He was put in a litter and carried back through that mighty inferno, but he never regained consciousness and before the terrible battle of Germaine Fielding was over he died. Thus perished another well renowned Glandelinian general, one of the ablest of soldiers, next to any of the Manleys, and another of the wickedest men in the last of his many triumphs and defeats.¹⁴⁴

The death of this general, the supposed murderer of the child-rebel leader, Annie Aronburg, might be thought to provide for the final Christian victory, but by this time Darger has introduced so many generals with this name that confusion is rampant and justice obscured.

For the Vivian girls, perhaps the most confusing loss is the death of their wicked older brother, the Glandelinian general Germania Vivian, at the Battle of Lester De Pester.

One of the greatest tragedies of the war occurred at this bloody battle. It was indeed during the seemingly highest fury of the terrific battle, when the enemy were making one of their wildest onslaughts against the whole line of heights simultaneously, that general Germania Vivian leading the charge against the christian line was shot to pieces by a discharge from a gathling gun.¹⁴⁵

Hearing of the death of their black sheep brother, the little girls respond with remarkable sangfroid, until they obtain additional information which permits them to experience more appropriate feelings.

"Your brother Germania Vivian is dead. Evans told it to the camp this morning. He was killed at Lester De Pester." At first the little girls were shocked at this news, and almost burst into tears, but then they believed there was no use in feeling so over the death of a wicked man even if he was their brother when there was a sure certainty he died wickedly and so they said,

"It is bad news for us, but it is sadder for him than us. If he died still in his wickedness, then it will help us none to cry over it."¹⁴⁶

We then learn that though shot to pieces on the battlefield, he in fact died in camp in a state of grace. This changes things considerably!

"He really died a better man for he was repentant, and begged Evans to forgive him, and ask you little girls to forgive him too. He allowed himself to be anointed by a priest, and received the Last Sacraments. So you would have reason to feel the loss."

"We do," said the poor little girls, "But we feel better, and do not hardly need to weep when we are sure he is not lost forever."¹⁴⁷

The effect of this long sequence of deaths, although most of them occur on the battlefield, is to some extent to allow Darger to explore feelings of grief connected with specific individuals. He describes Johnston Jacken Manley's sadness at the death of his sons, or the Vivian girls' varying responses to the deaths of friends, their adopted brother Penrod, or their traitorous brother Germania. Behind these deaths lie concealed his own experiences of death in the family, that of his father in 1908, and of his uncle August in 1916.¹⁴⁸ Curiously, he arranged for Uncle August to fight in *The Realms* as a Christian general, alongside of himself, and to die in battle in 1916.¹⁴⁹ More deeply buried, his response to his mother's death was not available for feeling, but clearly underlies the entire structure that is *In the Realms of the Unreal*.

In his enthusiasm Darger even played with his own death in battle, indeed at one point we are briefly deluded into thinking he is dead.

To save himself from the disgrace of surrender, Darger had turned a spitting machine gun full upon general Evans, with the intention of riddling him with bullets, but the rush of Angelinians between him received the storm of canister, and Evans riding around another way, got in the rear of the Glandelinian general and crying, "Die like a dog you cur," shot him fifteen times in the back.¹⁵⁰

Darger has, of course, set us up. He encourages us to believe that Henry Darger has gone mad and attacked Jack Evans. Then he reveals that this is another Henry Darger, a Glandelinian general. He evidently relished the idea of having two Henry Dargers, one on each side, fighting in the same

battle. As the war nears its conclusion, the good Darger now begins to play a more active role, appearing as a major leader and influential general, along with Jack Evans, his alter ego, assuming command of the Christian forces.

The siege of the rebel capital, Glandelinia, is a lengthy affair, involving many pages of description and endless detail.¹⁵¹ Its fall to the Christian invaders provides an occasion for wild excitement and celebration, perhaps reflective of actual celebrations at the conclusion of the First World War, which Darger may have witnessed and certainly read about in the newspapers.

It was as if the whole world was cheering at one time, and to make matters more joyful all factories in every city of the world closed for a week, and fire crackers were used so freely that the din of their explosions was terrific. But the most prettiest part of the celebrations was of the numerous christian flags hanging from every window, or across the streets, in the cities of the nations, the flags on staff, and of the school children in their own prettiest celebration, which made a scene which would have awed and thrilled anyone who could have observed it. Some scoffed at these celebrations, believing at first that all this good news about the fall of the Glandelinian capital was false, but it was not, and when the news also came in that all of eastern and southern Glandelinia was in possession of the christians, and that many armies of the foe had been destroyed or captured, the whole world went wild with joy and excitement. "Glan-

delinia has fallen," was the cry heard everywhere in the streets of Abbieannian cities themselves. "The war will soon be over. Glandelinia has fallen."¹⁵²

At this point, sixteen pages from the end, Darger's ambivalence about bringing his war to an end becomes agonizingly apparent as he allows General Manley to escape from the capital, and to fight on for a time.¹⁵³ His goal is to have Manley captured alive, and so he allows him to continue to struggle hopelessly against all odds. He portrays him, however, as experiencing deep despair. In his depression he repeatedly attempts suicide, but is prevented from carrying out this cowardly act by his loyal followers. In his desperation he is like a cornered lion. Darger too appears as something of a cornered lion in his reluctance to lay down his pen, and to commit to a final Christian victory.

Indeed it did seem almost impossible to capture the desperate Glandelinian general Johnston Jacken Manley. He had now only about 23,000 men with him but nevertheless he and these seemed to elude all of the christian persuers, and it seemed possible he would break through the christian lines. And by hack he did. It was early in the next morning that he managed to discover a sort of gap in the incircling christian line, and taking advantage of it he passed through before he was discovered.

Evans learned of his escape and decided to pursue in person ... For if Manley remained at large he could in no time gather other armies and prolong the war for over another year. And all of the christian nations wished to see it end this very year if possible, and Evans was bound to

see that it did ... Violet and her sisters wished to go along, and so Evans seeing that they desired excitement decided to grant their wish, and the little girls were included with them ...

... General Manley laughed haughtily to himself, and decided that instead of being the one captured, he would do his best to make every effort to capture Violet and her sisters ... But General Manley's days were reckoned now. God's fearful vengeance was about to be hurled upon him.¹⁵⁴

The actual capture of General Manley is not a particularly dramatic event. It may have been modeled on a similar scene in another war, but no specific source has been identified as yet. It is accomplished by Jack Evans:

Manley was swimming the great river on a most powerful horse, followed by a negro servant on another ... Evans immediately rode in after him covering him with his pistols, and general Baldwin followed. Manley showed resistance, but several of the soldiers also urging their horses into the water soon was at his side, and Manley was really a prisoner ...

"You are the most dangerous and most desperate of all the Glandelinians that I have ever faced," said general Evans himself. "You are nevertheless guilty of the slaughter of so many children that it would fill the whole united states which is so far from us. Your penalty no doubt will be severe, but what it is we or none of us christian generals know. Only general Hanson Vivian wishes to know."¹⁵⁵

THE FINAL SCENE of Darger's story, the surrender of General Johnston Jacken Manley (see 4.1), is handled with all the formality, elegance, and artifice of a gentleman's war. What must Darger have felt as he wrote the concluding page of what to this point had been his life work? Despite its brevity, astonishing for Henry, the scene is amazing in pulling together various narrative threads, while at the same time preserving the element of surprise to the very end. It has to be admitted that the gentlemanly conclusion designed by Darger seems totally inappropriate given the enormity of the crimes committed by the Glandelinians and their leader. Had he not had another ending up his sleeve, this resolution of the war would appear as a real anticlimax, unworthy of the book as a whole. This is an event calculated to display the manly dignity of worthy opponents, and in particular the nobility of character and generosity of General Hanson Vivian. Darger too seems strongly aware of the solemnity of the event he is portraying.

Hanson's army arrived the next day, and Evans at once rode up to the general when the army had halted and encamped and said, "Your excellency, general Manley is a prisoner. We captured him after a month persuit and fighting. He kept us going after him for over a thousand miles."

"Yes, I know it is true," said the great christian general, who was also joyful. "I learned of it yesterday and so hastened my advance. Will you bring him before me. It was you who captured him, and so it is you who have the honor of escorting him before me."

Evans saluted and left, and soon Manley was before the great general Hanson Vivian.¹⁵⁶

Darger draws on historical models for the first moves in this formal drama of surrender. He is aware of the pragmatism of great generals and statesmen, and so both sides make their decisions at first in terms of the reality of the situation.

"You are a prisoner of war," said general Hanson. "But you have so many guilty things to account for, that great general as you are, you are worthy of death. But as your two sons were the cause of most of it, we will not tolerate your destruction if you will act wisely and surrender as you were ordered to. You are a prisoner, but as long as the other armies of Glandelinia know you have refused to surrender they will not give up even if annihilated. So to save yourself from execution you will take good advice and do as you are told."

Manley realized indeed that all was off. Some of the armies operating in the west had been captured, and only three of the fifteen only survived, as the others had met annihilation in six great battles. There was no hopes any further to hold out against the christians, and so Manley decided it was best to surrender.

But then comes a surprise no one, and certainly not the unsuspecting reader, seems to have anticipated: the freeing of General Manley. "He surrendered himself and the whole of Glandelinia an hour afterwards, and so was allowed his freedom, which astonished the whole of the christian army."

Undoubtedly, Darger was influenced in this denouement by his knowledge of the final act of the American Civil War, of which we are told: "These enemies in many a bloody battle ended the war not with shame on one side and exultation on the other but with a soldier's 'mutual salutation and farewell.'"¹⁵⁷ Like General Grant, Darger undoubtedly felt compassion for this unlucky general who he, as author, has finally, and somewhat unwillingly, been forced to surrender to the Christian cause. Grant's words contain much that Darger may also have experienced. "I felt sad and depressed at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought."¹⁵⁸ And so Darger arranges for the heroic final scene, this meeting of equals in a spirit of forgiveness, filled with promise for the future.

It is quite incredible that Darger seems never to have depicted this final moment of military drama in a painting, since it seems, quite literally, to take shape before our eyes. He loved such portrayals of military grandeur¹⁵⁹ (4.14). The scene, with magnificent uniforms, flags flying, and, of course, the Vivian girls, arrayed in all their childish beauty and confronting their onetime foe, would have been very much to his taste. Only Darger seems to be missing, but in all of his illustrations he seems almost never to have depicted himself.¹⁶⁰

Manley is now called upon to respond to the generosity of his enemies and to act with similar nobility and generosity; and so, abandoning military protocol, he apologizes to the children, asking them to forgive him for his wickedness.

"I know," he had said to Violet and her sisters, "that I have persecuted you a lot, but it was mostly for spying, and not the motives that my two wicked sons had persecuted you for. But for all I have done, I do ask pardon and will refrain hereafter from further bloodshed, and shall atone as much as possible all the evil I have done to you and to your country. I shall atone for all the children who have been slain, and also will atone for all the ravages that my war has caused. As soon as I can get Glandelinia my nation settled down, I will leave the scene of my cruel havoc for a long while, and when I return to Glandelinia I hope I will be a better man. As for the little Vivian girls, I again beg your pardon, and hope that you will live hereafter more happier lives, and that all your sorrows that you had will be never remembered. We must be friends now since the war will soon be over, and hope to stay friends as long as we live."

He was allowed to shake hands with Violet and her sisters, and then all of the christian generals shook hands with him.

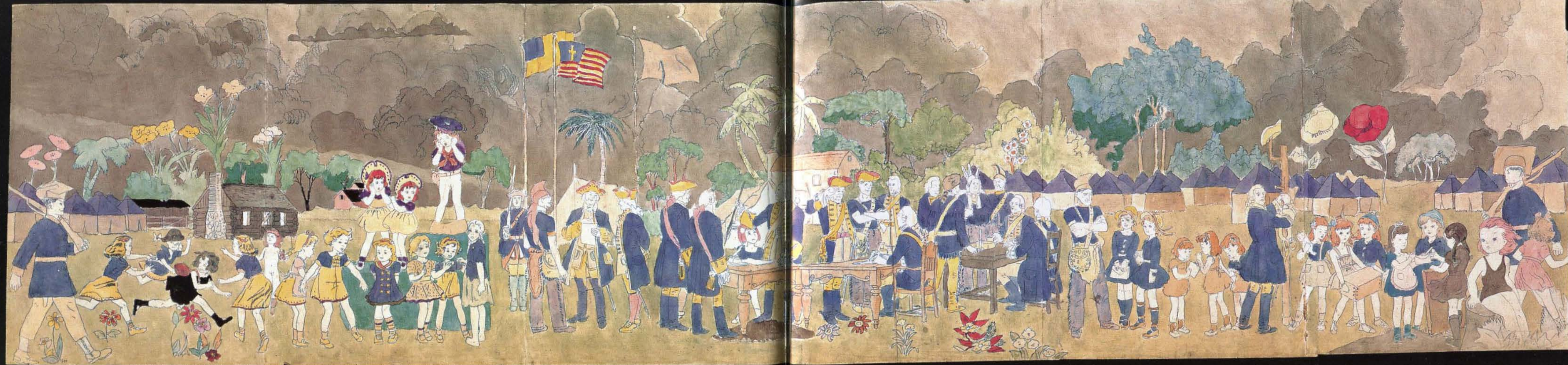
MANLEY'S somewhat lame excuses, and his promises to atone for what has been a bloodbath far surpassing any war in history, may have been acceptable to the innocent children and the forgiving Christian adults, but not to Darger or to God. Justice has not yet been rendered, but as Darger well knew justice is ultimately the responsibility of God. As an atheist Manley shows a surprising attentiveness to the deity, to whom he now turns for forgiveness. But God is silent. Darger, meanwhile, is quietly and calmly setting the scene, completing the circle. The real ending is yet to come; but it is found not at the end of *The Realms*, but fifty pages into volume one!¹⁶¹ When it comes, it is swift and terrible. The last page of Darger's book, however, provides no hint of the doom that awaits the Glandelinians. The final words are assigned to General Hanson Vivian.

"General Manley, we know that though you are a Glandelinian general you have not done as much crimes as your two sons and so cannot find much fault against you as long as you are sincerely repentant. We know that war and your sins had proven your bitterest enemies, for your two sons are gone into hell, and you have lost even all your armies. You alone can thank God that you did not succeed in committing suicide as you had attempted, for God only knows where it would have brought you. As you was better than the rest of the Glandelinian generals we will gladly grant you your freedom, but on the grounds that you must not do as you threat. Do not desert Glandelinia because she has

fallen. Show your mettle by upbuilding the fallen nation, and make her better and more christian like ... You may rest assured that sooner or later you may be elected King over Glandelinia for all your brave fighting you have shown. Though overthrown, conquered, and captured, there has never been a better fighter than you, and though you are beaten down, your nation I'm sure will appreciate your heroism, and will make you ruler. So now you may go, and God grant that never again will there ever come such a catastrophe as this."

Manley was led outside, and then he passed through the long files of christian infantry. [He mounted his] magnificent horse, and rode off toward his own ...¹⁶²

With these words the Glandco-Angelinian war ends, as General Manley, future ruler of the Glandelinian nation, rides off as it were into the sunset — and the total annihilation of his people and himself.



4.14

Henry Darger

Untitled [Campground in stormy landscape with soldiers and Vivian sisters]. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, on pieced paper. 22 x 96 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

5



The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his nails.

—James Joyce¹

The author writes the scenes in this volume as if he often had experienced them himself, as if at one time he is on the side of the foe, at other on that of the christians, then again he is with Penrod and his friends, or with Violet and her sisters, or with the christian generals. Some times he writes as if he was actually one of the surviving victims of flood, fire or explosion disaster, or fights in battles for one side or another.

—Henry Darger²

GOOD AND EVIL DARGERS IN THE REALMS

The psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes.

—Sigmund Freud³

5.1

Henry Darger

Mascot Girl Scout 20th
Grade, Regiment L.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Henry Darger was very conscious of himself as author of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. He had no desire to be invisible, or to disappear behind his creation. He was anything but indifferent. He identifies himself as the writer, "Henry Jos. Darger, in the army of the United States of America. Author of written manuscript."⁴ His name appears on those title pages which survive for each volume, as well as in the text, where he frequently interrupts the narrative to address his "dear reader" directly. Adopting a device commonly encountered in nineteenth-century literature, he steps to the front of the stage to comment personally on events or characters in the story, or on decisions he has made as writer, concerning the form or contents of his writing, which he thinks the reader should be told about. When addressing his "dear reader," Darger usually speaks as an adult to adults, with the reader, now grown mysteriously older, reading history rather than a story book for children.

We readers, and even the writer here can question if a more spirited result was ever accomplished than the results of the final charge of general Winter's division on the afternoon of that terrible All Saints Day at this battle of Heddarann.⁵

The creator of an alternate world often experiences himself as God. Manipulating the lives of his characters, playing with their fate, making decisions of life and death, he feels himself to be uniquely in control. This was far more true for Darger than for other more typical authors (see chapter 12). But, as we will see, unfolding events in *The Realms* are unexplainably and irrationally influenced by his feelings, his reality. At times, Darger himself seems caught up in this delusion, believing in the dangerous ability of written words

to shape reality. As author he was sometimes frightened of the dangerous implications of what he might write. Even his readers could not always be trusted.

Now, of course, I myself would not dare to write down the plans of this very General, if I thought my readers would study them too carefully so as to be able to warn Manley, in case they were favoring his cause and his nations, but it is a fact that no one else in the world except the General (Up to the time of this story) had been able to form such an important plan, and so I do not even think it would be even safe to give it to my own mother.⁶

The man making these interjections is the author, H. J. Darger, whose books and pictures of children are, surprisingly, discovered early in the story by the Vivian girls, not in his room in Chicago, but in far-off Abbieannia. Even when the children learn the author's name, they show no sign of recognizing it, or of knowing him. He is simply a lonely man, living in far-off America.

For those of us familiar with Darger's room and its contents in Chicago (and particularly with the many pictures of little girls which adorned its walls), it comes as something of a surprise to find fictional characters from *The Realms* occasionally stumbling unaware into a room which we recognize as Henry's.⁷ In the final volume, for example, Jack Evans, while on a spying expedition, discovers a "large and stately mansion" in a remote area:

... as the house looked suspicious to him, Evans decided to examine it. He crept up close to the building, and looked in ... he was startled and surprised at what he saw. In the room was a large and handsome round table, the room itself being of great size. The table was covered with big books and papers, and the room was filled with all kinds of rubbish, while hanging on the walls were the same kind of child pictures that the Vivian girls had in their possession. On the table was a small ledger book, two pages of which in the back also showed pictures of children.⁸

But more strange still, around the table was seated at least three score of the highest Glandelinian generals that Evans had ever faced in his life. What they were up to he did not know, but he was nevertheless suspicious, and leaving the window, entered the house, after giving a signal for his men to surround the house, and then entering the palace like building, he made from room to room as cautiously as a cat with pistol drawn, until he reached the door of the room where the sixty officers of the foe were seated around the big table ...

"I wonder who in hell owns all of these pictures of children?" asked another of the leaders. "I would not care about it, but they are children of Angelinian nationality because they look it. The recent owner of this building ought to be punished for keeping pictures of christian children."

"Never mind those darn old pictures, and get down to business."⁹

What seems to be happening is that Henry's room, like its mysterious occupant, is curiously mobile, with a tendency to show up occasionally in the Realms of the Unreal. But when it does, it is not recognized as his, and he is not in it. The characters in *The Realms* have little or no familiarity with far-off Chicago, or with the writer Henry Darger who lives there. However, through their encounters with his room, or with his missing books and pictures, they are able to sense something of his reality. The disturbingly lifelike portraits of the Vivian girls, and other children, from his room, are understood to reflect his loneliness and isolation. It is apparent even to the Vivian girls that these pictures of children serve as substitutes for the real little girls Darger longed for (5.1).

There is a similar passage earlier in *The Realms*, where Jack Saunders finds himself alone in an unfamiliar room. Looking at the contents, Jack imagines that the room belongs to a little girl who is, significantly, not there. Slowly his mood begins to change, as feelings surface as if from the room itself, feelings which we recognize as belonging, not to Jack Saunders, but to Darger.¹⁰ For a brief moment we are with the author in his room in Chicago; we feel his loneliness, his longing, and his pain.

Jack observed that on the wall were pasted countless religious pictures that were cut out of Catholic books. In between were drawings and religious postcards that were of the saints. In the corner was a large kitchen range." Jack wished he had lived in this room before the war had come.

The books in the case looked to be second hand, and all kinds of fairy stories for example, and there was one volume in black cloth. He wondered if the little girl had read most of them, for though he yet was a small boy, fairy stories really never appealed to him. He always preferred the other books, books too which were not so expensive as fairy stories. In high class stores in American cities, story books for children cost, as we well know, over two dollars; much too high a price at that, but in Abbieannia a four dollar book you couldn't get for 10 dollars now. He saw that one of the shelves was filled with school books of all kinds ... Then below, he found periodicals, papers, and letters all jammed in together with drawings and rough sketches.

Now Jack wished to think himself back into the good old times when the conflict had not come. It was very still in the room, he felt the silence at once, it seemed that even the walls had preserved it ... He felt more that he wanted the quiet rapture again, he wanted to feel the same powerful urge that he used to feel when he turned to his own books at home ... Jack desired for the moment to feel that he belonged here, that the little girl was his youngest sister ... He waited and waited, and still the little girl did not appear. Strange images floated through his mind, but they did not grip him at all, they seemed to be mere shadows and sad memories. Nothing seemed good, nothing behaved, all was disorder, and a terrible feeling of dejectedness suddenly rose up in him.¹²

Confusion and Confrontation: Multiple Dargers in *The Realms*

From the beginning, the author wrote himself into *The Realms*, allowing for the occasional appearance of a character named Henry Darger. Not surprisingly, he wished to participate in the other world he was creating, to encounter the beautiful Vivian girls and to play a part in the war. If it were merely a question of the Henry Darger we know, stepping into the story and playing the part of a hero in this fictional alternate world, the function of such an autobiographical character, and of such a fantasy, would be readily comprehensible. However, the situation is vastly more complex, since we are faced with multiple and overlapping Henry Dargers, a host of personalities whose differing identities can and do come into conflict with one another. These relatively distinct, but occasionally merging, Dargers prove confusing both to the reader and to the various characters in *The Realms*.

Paradoxically, despite this abundance of fragmentary personalities, all identified as separate Henry J. Dargers (or variants of that name), the Darger characters, added up, still represent only a minor component of the vast story. Surprisingly, Darger, in all of his manifestations, actually plays only an insignificant role in the history that is *In the Realms of the Unreal*. He only appears from time to time, and contributes only marginally to the unfolding of events. Yet, as we will see below, mysteriously and behind the scenes, it is his sense of injustice and of betrayal by God which will ultimately determine the outcome of the war and the fate of both Christians and Glandelinians. What we, and they, are not told is how.

The fundamental split between the forces of good and evil, which runs straight through *The Realms* from top to bottom, also separates the various Dargers into two distinct camps. It is essential to differentiate between the Dargers fighting on the Christian side, and those who serve the Glandelinians, even though at certain moments, they can appear to be one Darger during different phases of his existence. That they can appear as foes confronting each other on the same battlefield makes it difficult, at least for characters in the story, to reconcile these fragments as parts of one and the same person. The confusion is so great that it has led some psychologically sophisticated readers to contemplate the possibility of a diagnosis of multiple personality disorder. Such a diagnosis is precluded, however, by the fact that the author, Henry J. Darger, is far too aware of the game he is playing, taking evident delight in the confusion he engenders.

Glandelinian Dargers

Henry tells us that he enlisted in the Glandelinian army on September 20, 1913, serving until December 6, 1913, when he was rejected (this brief period of service in an imaginary army predates by four years, but otherwise parallels, the period of Darger's real service in the United States army).¹³ However, an evil Glandelinian Darger is actually present throughout the Glandco-Abbieannian war, and in all the volumes of *The Realms*. He plays an increasingly active role as a leading general on the various fields of battle. The Vivian girls are very much aware of him as a dangerous foe. Toward the end of the story, they still speak of him with trepidation, though now in the past tense, as "Henry Joseph Darger on the side of the Glandelinians."

"The one on the side of the enemy was equal in fury to our dreaded enemy general Raymond Richardson Federal whom we shot."

"And he was a dangerous raider too," said Violet. "He was more dreaded by the christians than all of the Glandelinian generals put together ... But general Henry Darger just used to ride his large cavarly forces around the rear of our christian armies and commit incapable damage everywhere, and start forest fires that burned hundreds of miles of forests in a few weeks."¹⁴

It is from the Vivian sisters that we learn something of the origins of this evil General Darger: "He was not a born Glandelinian at all, his nationality is Abbieannian, and so for his service in the Glandelinian army he makes himself a treacherious traitor."¹⁵

Like most adult male Glandelinians, this atheistic Darger passionately hates little girls, displaying the inordinate interest typical of the enemy in the internal anatomy of their bodies. General Huebaum Manley, one of the leaders of the Glandelinian armies, is well aware of Darger's hatred of female children, and of the Vivian girls in particular.

"I know who is the man who can shoot them on sight," said Huebaum Manley ... Get that general Darger to take out a squad of men, instruct him to locate the Vivian girls and slay them in an ambush."¹⁶

Not surprisingly, the Vivian girls are present as spies on this occasion, and so, from their hiding place, are able to get a good look at General Darger, as well as obtain insight into his sadistic, even murderous nature.

Violet and her sisters saw a general of medium height approaching. He had a continual scowling way about him, was quick and snappy in his action, wearing a long robe in gray coloring with a hood unfastened and hanging down his back. When he came up to them and dismounted, he saluted the three Manleys as if he was trying to throw his arm from his shoulder, bringing his hand down to his side with a resounding crash. Violet and her sisters had never observed a fiercer looking man.¹⁷

Inevitably, the children are confused, since they are familiar with another General Darger who serves the Christian cause. And what of the Henry J. Darger whose books and pictures they once possessed? Violet is speaking:

"Anyway it seems to be a man either on the Christian side, or on the enemy's side by the name of Henry Darger. This is also suspicious besides mysterious."

"And he looks the same like the one whom we returned the manuscript to," whispered Jennie. "I don't like this. It is either he is treacherious, or there is something else. He seems to wear the purple on one day and the gray the next. We will have to watch them, or him."¹⁸

Darger receives his orders, from General Manley, and is more than willing to comply:

"Take a squad of men out and make a search for them. When you discover them, lure them in ambush and kill them. To prove of your success, bring their foul little bodies to me."

"I'll do so your excellency," said Darger. "I hate them worse than the most dreaded disease, and I lust in their killing. If I succeed in getting them, I'll tear their bodies open alive."¹⁹

This passage is extremely unusual in the context of *The Realms* in admitting that at least one Darger represents a specifically sadistic danger to the little girls. This admission of perverse lust could seem to undermine the defense mechanism which otherwise is invariably used to deny the author's murderous impulses, by projecting them onto the Glandelinian enemy. The hint, supplied by Jennie, of a link between this Glandelinian general and the man they returned the manuscripts to, also tends to incriminate the author of *The Realms*. I know of no other passage in any of the volumes where any Darger confesses to entertaining such monstrous desires.

AS A WRITER, and also in real life, Darger enjoyed playing about with his own name. In later life he used the name Dargarus and Dargarius, even in dealing with the US government.²⁰ In *The Realms* one of the devices he used on at least one occasion to distinguish good Dargers from bad was to call an evil version of himself Joseph H. Darger, reversing his first and middle names. This allowed for the confrontation he seemed to desire between good and bad Dargers.

A little before the battle of Hedda Rann the main section of the army of Glandelinians under general Joseph H. Darger remained in comparative quiet on the southern and northern side of the Erminie Run Creek ...

General Joseph Darger now determined to move upon Trot and Betsy with his whole force, and then push on to Rosa, but learning that general Henry Darger and Viviananna was well across the streams and was now threatening his flanks and rear ... General Joseph Darger now began to look for a more vulnerable point of attack on the christian lines.²¹

Joseph Darger's hesitancy, and our confusion, is certainly compounded when we learn that General Henry Darger, with twenty-five million men, had a very strong position "in the region of St. Vincent's Church and St. Joseph's Hospital" — Henry's Chicago neighborhood! It is evident that Henry delights in the confusion he can create, and in the multiple layers of reality and unreality with which he can play.

In the final volume such confrontations on the battlefield continue, now without the use of reversed names. Confusion is inevitable.

If it had not been for a blunder on the side of the enemy also nothing serious would have occurred. But there was also a misunderstanding of orders and general Darger of the Glandelinian-McHollestinians, believing that the cannonade was a sign for an assault, launched his whole army forward against a portion of the christian-line under the christian general Henry Joseph Darger ...

The Glandelinians had not expected such fierce resistance at all, and gave up the assault when it was not intended so by their officers, and not believing anything would happen, they retired quickly and sullenly to their own works. Darger had lost his favorite horse during the terrific struggle, which had been a prize to him and he felt so sore over it that he decided to take revenge for the attack upon his lines ... The charge tore its way through the Glandelinian forces under the other Henry Darger.²²

As author, Darger loved to lead his readers down the garden path, setting them up with shocking, and erroneous, revelations which he later corrected. One of the finest of these misleading events is a scene which we have already encountered (see p. 228). We are led, through a calculated confusion of names, to believe that the Christian general Henry Darger has, in a moment of madness, attacked his friend General Jack Evans. So caught up is our author in depicting this shocking event, and wishing to turn the tables on us with extreme suddenness,

that he not only reveals that it was the Glandelinian general Darger who had attacked Evans, but allows him to be killed. Or does he? Dead as a doornail on page 3440, General Darger of the Glandelinians resurfaces on page 3478, alive and well.

THE FINAL FATE of the Glandelinian Darger, like everything else about him, remains obscure. In a conversation between the Vivian girls and their guardian Jack Evans, we learn of a possible reason for Darger's rejection from the Glandelinian army.

They immediately spoke to him [Evans] about the letters they had read, of the Glandelinian general by the name of Henry Joseph Darger, and of his being a traitor over his loss. "Oh yes, I know about that Glandelinian general," said Evans. "Well, he won't serve the Glandelinian army again, I'm sure. He received a wound at the battle of Virginia Run which makes it impossible for him to rejoin the Glandelinian armies again."²³

In a later chapter (chapter 9), we will examine in detail a series of moving encounters between the evil General Darger and the ghost of the murdered child, Annie Aronburg. We will consider the possibility that he played a part in her death, as well as exploring the irrational and unexplained power he wields in magically determining the outcome of the great war. It is this General Darger, the dark manifestation of the author's self, who in the story carries most of the burden of the struggle with God that gives meaning to *The Realms*. And it is his disillusionment and rage which underlies and motivates the terrible conflict and suffering troubling the Realms of the Unreal.

Hendro Joseph Dargar: Chief of the Abbieannian Gemini

"The most dangerous persons the rebels fear the most, are not Violet and her sisters, but the members of the Great Gemini, who are spies and great thinkers."²⁴

Early in *The Realms* Captain Henry Darger of the US army is summoned to Abbieannia by a letter from Jack Evans (see p. 96). With this letter, and his decision to travel to this distant land, Darger enters the Realms of the Unreal. From the beginning his mission is concerned with the Vivian girls; from the start he is identified as an enemy of the Glandelinians. This Darger is clearly a good man and a Christian.

Seven beautiful little girls all the dearest friends of mine have suffered untold horrors at the hands of the wicked Glandelinian enemies, tortures which I'm sure you may have heard about. You belong to that powerful society called the Gemini, and we request you to come over to Abbieannia, if you are permitted, and help the Government officials of Abbieannia run down all the enemies of the Vivian girls remaining at large and do something to end the child slave horror.²⁵

Darger is assisted in his work by his close friend William Schloeder, and by all the members of the child protection society known as the Gemini. Schloeder, a resident of Chicago, accompanies Darger without difficulty into the Unreal, where he too undergoes a number of surprising metamorphoses, splitting into several conflicting versions of himself. While the actual existence of a Chicago branch of the Gemini remains somewhat uncertain,

its Abbieannian counterpart exists, and is easily adapted to the fictional world of the Realms. There, its main function is spying on the enemy, with Darger now in the role of chief investigator and spy, as well as "Supreme Person of the Abbieannian Gemini."²⁶ In this connection he undergoes an occasional and, not unexpected, change of name.

The Supreme Person Hendro Dargar is a very great spy, and his two assistants, Gingigore and William Schloederline, are equal. They are very honorable and they too have arrived at such a quality.²⁷

While Dargar and his assistant play an important part in the story, emerging as close friends of the Vivian princesses, the other members of the shadowy organization, concealed beneath their long robes, grow ever more obscure. Only on one occasion does this society suddenly take on a semblance of real existence, with a midnight meeting of the Black Brothers Lodge. This dramatic scene raises more problems than it resolves.²⁸

Among the Abbieannians the christian spies who founded the 1911 Cluster of the black Brothers lodges called the Geminii had chosen from twenty one possible candidates, in particular all who had in mind the possibility of becoming wearers of the Pin of the Twins, of the Black Brothers who had decided to enter the lodge, to be sent to find out the special direction of the retreating Glandelinian armies and find out what the main purpose of their retreat was.²⁹ As in the case many of these dangerous Abbieannian spies represented some of the most prominent families in the world. Eventually every one of them would and did come into enough of this

great wars perdition as to place them as the greatest of soldier spies...

On the day of the news of the surprising retreat and rout of the Glandelinian armies, the Supreme Person with Solemn formality notified the other persons that on the following night a meeting will be held in the darkness of the Chamber. No details was necessary to convey the purpose of the main gathering.

A few minutes before the time set for the Destiny meeting, as the final Convention of the Chamber had come to be called; 11:30 o'clock, the Supreme Person entered the chamber. For a long time he is alone ... From the vault he took the Constitution and the laws of the Geminii and the Black Sack of Destiny.³⁰ These he placed on a long black table which stood at the side of the first chair. After donning his official regalia, a long black robe with hood attached, he turned off the gas, and lighted a stub of candle, which he placed on the table. Precisely at 11 o'clock he opened the door leading to the room of rest, and standing on the Threshold in the full and Solemn dignity of his office, spoke in subdued tones, slowly and impressively:

"Persons of the Geminii, it is the command of the Supreme Person that ye enter into the Chamber. There ye shall know more ... This night in the full darkness of this Sacred Chamber ye shall take into hand that which the Mighty and beloved

Supreme Person in General Hanson's army, Concentinian Aronburg, has deemed wise they ye should have." Thus far my Brothers ye have during this whole bloody war borne your honors well, and ye all deserve in fullest measures the approval of your Main Supreme Person of all and that is I, general Darger. It is the Night of Destiny." ... The eyes of all turned to the candle. The tallow was now but little more than a smudge, and the light was beginning to sputter. Gradually it burned away, until it was only a dying spark of wick. When the room was in total darkness, the Supreme Person in more solemn tones went on:

"On account of dangerous Glandelinian spies it is the command of all Geminii that I your main Supreme Person now place my hand into the Black Sack of Destiny and take out an envelope for my own separate eyes alone." Slowly and impressively he followed and drew out his instructions ...

The Supreme Person, now the First Person divested himself of his official regalia, was the first to go behind the screen; there to read the contents of his envelope. He is gone less than a minute, and when he came into view of the wondering persons, there is a soft sinister smile on his lips, and an expression of mystery in his eyes.³²

Of all the Dargers in the Realms it is the Gemini Darger who takes on an identity closest to that of the author. That he is a foreigner, an American living in Chicago, might seem to suggest that they are one. This possibility is supported by the fact that the books and pictures discovered in Abbieannia by the Vivian girls are understood to belong to this Darger.

We have certain property that belongs to a man called Darger, which we saved from the Glandelinians, and we have not long ago sent a letter to him telling him to come and claim it. We sent it to the place where he had been working before he joined the ranks.³³

The multiplicity of Dargers in the Realms inevitably leads to considerable confusion concerning the ownership of these important documents (evil General Darger's claim to them, to be discussed below, seems immeasurably stronger). The reader too is confused by this serious problem. But, as we will see, many Dargers in the story lay claim to these lost properties.

Having met the Vivian sisters early in *The Realms*, Gemini Darger soon becomes a trusted friend. This is true despite the fact that he never allows himself much real intimacy with the little girls. Because their beauty is unnerving, religious feelings are regularly called on to protect him from temptation.

When he was alone captian Darger pondered on the situation. He had always been longing for once to see for once those fair creatures called the Vivian girls, and to know them as well. He loved children very dearly ... He knew however that to approach the Vivian girls he must do the same thing when preparing for Holy Communion. He must be in a state of grace, never use any profane language, like he once in a while did, and must be better in controlling his hasty temper which he generally had. He did it is true go to confession and Holy Communion, generally three times a week, Confession once a week.³⁴

The feeling of trepidation at the prospect of encountering the Vivian girls, as well as several biographical facts mentioned in this passage, all serve to connect Gemini Darger's reality with that of the writer Henry Darger. What separates them is the confident and powerful self-image of the great Gemini leader: his solemn and controlled demeanor, his astonishing abilities as an international spy, and his startling intellect. He also seems somewhat older.

The foreign spy Gemini General Dargar ... is a nice old man and well liked by all the officers ... We however call him Abbieannia's International Professional Spy. And because through the work of his members all of the officers call him the "Shadow Cloud" of Abbieannia.³⁵

It was suggested to request the aid of the powerful Gemini Leader Dargar for this man was well known as an active and tireless spy and investigator and military detective, and nothing could escape his sharp eye. As no word could be heard of him, however, and as no one questioned his zeal and enthusiasm, and know he was always on the job and quickly on the spot, it was decided to wire to Angelinia Agathia and find out if he was still there and if his work there was finished.

"Where is he?" Instantly the same thought had occurred to every officer and soldier in the army who heard that question. The absence of this great man was unnatural.³⁶

In creating the figure of the leader of the Abbieannian Gemini, Darger constantly emphasizes his hero's unusual intellectual powers and his encyclopedic knowledge. Hendro Dargar appears at various points in the story to explain complex scientific matters. Borrowed passages from a variety of scientific textbooks are often assigned to Dargar, who uses them in his explanatory lectures. He is identified as an expert in volcanology, but displays considerable familiarity with a wide range of physical sciences, as well as with the history of catastrophic natural upheavals (see chapter 8). In *The History of My Life*, a similar expert, Henry

Darger, appears as an authority on scientific aspects of forest fires, as well as a courageous fire-fighter. Dargar's interests obviously parallel Darger's, reflecting the process of self-education and extensive reading that was going on in the room in Chicago. As a spy, a detective, and an investigator of natural upheavals, Dargar actually comes closer to being a scientist, with his investigations approximating scientific research more than international intrigue. In this he resembles the fictional character Walter Starring who we have yet to meet. Commenting on Dargar's activity, Starring says:

"Therefore when I received from General Hendro Dargar for study the materials which he too collected at Abbieann North during his investigations for the Abbieannian Geographic Societies, I received much pleasure in searching for the source of the dust. Hendro Dargar's collection embraces many specimens, most of which came from the region of Abbieann ... Dargar mentioned with some reserve of finding much copper slate, and other kind of mineral in his specimens of dust from the elevated part of what is left of Abbieann. This observation I believe to be quite correct."³⁷

Despite his relative remoteness and scientific objectivity, Darger is not lacking in human warmth and compassion for the suffering victims of catastrophe. At times he appears to be almost saintly in his efforts. Starring is speaking:

"Great praise is given the great Gemini leader. He and all of his followers have worked desperately and indefatigably to succor the survivors that are so hard to reach because of the nature of the disaster and the destroyed communications. He in person has bandaged the limbs of the wounded, and has worked without sleep or food, and they say he is now completely exhausted."³⁸

While attributing all of the finest Christian virtues to his Gemini self, Darger was also generous to his sidekick, William Schloeder. His description of Schloeder, placed in the mouths of the Vivian girls, is a warm and generous tribute to the man who had been his only true friend.

One of the members of the Gemini who came into the headquarters tent of Violet and her sisters to congratulate them, was the Assistant Supreme Person, Whilliam Schloder, the finest most successful secret service agent of the christian armies, in his own particular branch, Violet and her sisters had ever known and, despite his dignified and high position and great fame, the humblest man of most of the followers of the Gemini they had ever met.

Mr. Schloder and they had been, though they met each other only rarely, good faithful friends for years. One of the things that had drawn them or him to them was his exceeding kindness and brotherliness to everyone that he knew and to those of

the members who were under him. They loved to work for him, he loved to look out for their interest and direct them carefully in their missions. It had struck Violet and her sisters that his attitude toward those working under him was Christ like.³⁹

As we will see shortly, this description of Schloeder is limited to one side of the coin. We have yet to encounter his alter ego, the Glandelinian General Schloeder.

Gemini Darger also possesses a military side and his own armies; indeed he overlaps with yet another Darger, the Christian General Henry J. Darger. On occasion these two, relatively distinct, characters merge.

He besides being the Supreme Person is also one of the head generals in Hanson Vivian's army.⁴⁰

General Hendro Dargar, the Gemini, and Gingigore, arrived in camp with immense forces of troops, and their coming was hailed with delight by the embattled christian armies who now felt sure that the hour was at hand when the city of St. Ethelreda still smouldering in its vast stretches of ruins, was to be soon in the possession of the christian troops.⁴¹

The military side of Dargar is necessitated on this occasion because of the threatening presence of a dangerous group of Glandelinians who have just arrived on the scene: "There came a deep tramp, and an enormous brigade of Winkies led by general Hendry Darger filed up through the street."⁴²

H. J. Darger: War Correspondent

The least prominent Darger in *The Realms*, and certainly the one who is least often mentioned, is H. J. Darger, newspaperman and war correspondent. Paradoxically, it is this Darger who, seldom spoken of by name, is all but omnipresent. An avid reader of newspapers, Henry was an admirer of correspondents, particularly those who reported from the field of battle. In fantasy he may well have wished to emulate them.

Newspapers are often referred to in the story, and the Vivian girls and other characters regularly obtain information from them. It soon becomes apparent that war correspondents are covering events in the Realms of the Unreal, documenting the great war day by day. At one point, Walter Starring, who is as conscious of the publicity value of reporters as a presidential candidate, pauses to express his appreciation for their courageous efforts. He is obviously speaking for publication:

To him also it is a great pleasure to acknowledge the prompt and generous courtsey of newspaper and war correspondents in for his sake permitting the use of their own graphic accounts of conditions in the devastated regions and of accompanying him on his expeditions. These correspondents are, since the war began, the writers and makers of current Abbieannian history, always in the forefront when anything happens; no matter how dangerous, tireless and fearless, and therefore for Starring their work has a quality of merit recognized by him so much that he permitted quite a number to accompany him on his expeditions.⁴³

Among the correspondents serving in the Realms of the Unreal, though not a member of Starring's entourage, one would have to include the newspaperman and writer H. J. Darger. His prominence is suggested by the fact that he sometimes signs himself, "H. J. Darger, Manager of War Correspondents News." As a historian, and author of a history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war, Darger understood that the history of the present was being created by newspapermen. Much of the history narrated in *The Realms* was actually written as reports filed from the field. A curiously neutral and objective observer describes the irrational series of moves and counter-moves occurring "down below." His suspended position is dictated by the fact that he himself is never in danger, is able to see events occurring on a battlefield that can extend across many miles, and who is nevertheless cognizant of every death, and the destination of almost every bullet. He is ruthlessly honest in assessing success or failure, and willing to recognize courage or heroism on either side of the conflict. Darger's fictional correspondent, who exists in name only, is simply a representative of the author in the Realms of the Unreal.

Author Henry Joseph Aronburg Darger war correspondent taking in scenes of Glandco-Angelinian war made discoveries that great war is more terrific than it was ever expected to be. Will have to look into the matter.⁴⁴

To the extent that Henry lived in this alternate world, rather than in his room, he was H. J. Darger war correspondent, filing his reports from the Realms, submerged in an overwhelmingly intense sensory experience, lost in the unreal.

The author writes the scenes in this volume as if he often had experienced them himself, as if at one time he is on the side of the foe, at other on that of the christians, then again he is with Penrod and his friends, or with Violet and her sisters, or with the christian generals. Sometimes he writes as if he was actually one of the surviving victims of flood, fire or explosion disaster, or fights in battles for one side or another.⁴⁵

This statement, one of Darger's interjections to the reader, should be accepted with extreme literalness. It embodies with absolute precision the nature of his creative process, suggesting its near hallucinatory intensity. It also explains why his encyclopedic style ultimately goes far beyond anything one might encounter in a newspaper, in its compulsiveness suggesting an explanation for the vast gulf separating Darger from all other writers. It is his battle scenes which in their exhausting literalness and compulsive detail completely surpass the ability of any reader to follow Darger's injunction:

Let the reader follow battle after battle with the others. Let him follow every event and adventure in the volume, and then if he sets his mind and heart on it take it on as if he himself was an actual participant.⁴⁶

Darger demands as much of his reader as of himself: total commitment and the suspension of disbelief in the Realms of the Unreal. Take care, however! Can this Darger be trusted? Does he belong on the side of good, or of evil? This is by no means an issue easy of solution. It is raised by the Vivian girls themselves when, in the final volume

of *The Realms*, Joice Vivian speaking of this Darger raises an interesting possibility. "It does seem probable that he is really a secret Glandelinian officer, and not a war correspondent as stated."⁴⁷ This astute observation is, in part, confirmed by Darger himself, writing in a separate journal which does not form part of *The Realms*.

It was on November the fourteenth 1911, that though the terrible war is still raging, I have on account of the loss of the picture of the Aronburg child ... that I have, though still a correspondent, quit taking in accounts of the many battles already past since March and those now raging.⁴⁸

WHILE HE DOES NOT claim to be "an officer" secretly in the service of Glandelinia, he confesses to feelings of ambivalence, and indeed to leaning in the direction of the Glandelinian cause.

Though I took no part in the frightful war, only being a war correspondent, I nevertheless had great dread of the Glandelinian soldiery, though I did have luke warm sympathy for their cause because of the loss.⁴⁹

Clearly, this man is not to be trusted. He seems to be something of a traitor and a coward. He conceals his treasonous feelings, unwilling to act on them because he is afraid. Describing his reaction to events at the Battle of Marcocello, he writes: "Unable to stand the frightful scene and the terrific earsplitting roar of musketry, which almost shocked my very heart, and caused frenzy, I left the scene as quickly as I could."⁵⁰ If this hysterical and treacherous Darger is to be identified as the author of *The Realms*, the moral authority of the entire work is called into question.

However, toward the end of *The Realms*, this character seems to undergo a change of heart (if he is to be believed), and approaches Angelinia Aronburg to ask for forgiveness for his misdeeds. Does this inner transformation reflect Henry's concern over his own misdeeds?

"I am a man you may know well, though I do not mention any names," said the man. "I am partly responsible for what you and the Princesses have suffered through by my own careless fault, and therefore I have come to ask you to forgive me for the great wrong I did ..."

"Are you sorry then for sure?" asked Angelinia Aronburg, looking hard at the man.

"I am very sorry" declared the prisoner. "I have been thinking over my misdeeds for a long time, for I have little else to do but think, and being even a foreigner and a war correspondent, I'm surprised that I did such a wicked thing and had such little regard for your cause. I am now convinced that even had I succeeded in making myself fame I should not have been happy, for many hours of quiet thought have shown me that only those things that one acquires honestly are able to render one content ..."

"The poor fool seems truly sorry and if he has now become a good and honest man we ought to forgive him ..."

"I fear I could never become a citizen of Abbieannia," said the prisoner, "for the work I have done against you has brought me a bad reputation. But with the kind forgiveness of my former enemies, I hope afterwards to become a very good man and be highly respected ... I was ambitious and cruel. I've learned my lesson and I'd rather not stay here ... "Then you'll forgive me for all the trouble I have caused you and the Christian army?" he asked earnestly.

"Of course, we must forgive anyone who is really sorry for his offenses."

"Thankyou," said the man, and he allowed his two escorts to lead him away.⁵¹

Fighting on the Side of God: General Henry Joseph Darger

"You know we have two Dargers who we know of who have the very same looks and the same names, and the only difference is they are taller than one another."

—Joice Vivian⁵²

Henry Darger's detailed knowledge of the battles of the Glandco-Abbieannian war is based on a simple but fundamental fact: He served in every one of them. This piece of information emerges at the beginning of the story, during an examination of the pile of volumes composing Darger's history of the war. Amazed at the accuracy of the vast chronicle, General Jack Evans comments: "He certainly did make a good history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war ... He has every battle in their correct places, and he predicts that he served in them all."⁵³ Once this astonishing claim is accepted, the issue then becomes, which Darger? While we might wish to attribute this "prediction" to Darger the newspaper correspondent, we know that he abandoned his record-keeping in 1911, early on in the war. In any case, that Darger can hardly be said to have "served" in every battle, or even in one. He is too much of a coward for that.

Although there is a natural inclination to link the writer of this history with the evil Glandelinian General Darger (who claimed to own the volumes), a question raised by Violet Vivian seems to undermine that possibility: "I wonder how long he [the author of *The Realms*], served in the army of Calverinia?" Calverinia, which translated means "Country of Heaven," is a Christian nation, its generals Catholic to a man.⁵⁴ Thus, if we are to

believe the author's claim to have served in the war, the volumes of *The Realms* would have to be the work of Henry Joseph Darger, a Christian general fighting on the side of God. Good General Darger and the author are one.

It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, to realize that this fictional Darger seems to know less of Henry the writer than any other Darger in *The Realms*. Fighting valiantly in battle after battle, and frequently encountering defeat, he seems completely unaware of the machinations of the author who, behind the scenes, is manipulating events and determining the fate of the Christian forces, with the nonchalance of a heretic Glandelinian. This General Darger seems too one-sidedly good to be the author of *The Realms*.

IN CREATING the fictional Christian General Darger, Henry, as author, might have been expected finally to give birth to an autobiographical character of central importance, writing at least one major role for himself into his story. Surely one of the essential characteristics of fantasy is the tendency to imagine oneself in a leading role. Good General Darger, however, is far from being the hero of *The Realms*. While he does increase in importance toward the end of the story, he is never more than one general among many. In the final battles of the war his importance is also diminished by the fact that various members of his family, all Dargers, are fighting simultaneously, thus obscuring his individual contribution. The most that can be said is that from early on in the war there is a Henry Darger (perhaps more than one) fighting for the Christian cause.

In the early volumes Darger modestly appears as a simple soldier. In this guise he is immediately recognizable as the Darger we know, even though he may be in disguise.

The soldier then asked the spy if he cared to accompany him to his own tent, adding that he had just bought a book which he would like to read before going on drill duty again. So it was the first time that this spy ever entered a big christian tent which was fine and indicated the classy ways of the Abbieannian and Angelinian soldiers. The inside of the tent was sumptuously furnished and the walls of the tent were adorned with pictures of children. Evidently he was a keen admirer of little girls and boys, or at least [of] pictures of those kind that seem to look straight at you and watch your every move. The spy said as much to him. "No," the soldier answered, "I don't think that is the purple purpose. But they nevertheless give me a sort of thrill and kill my homesickness. I am like a child myself."⁵⁵

It is possible that this scene derives from an actual encounter during Henry's brief period in the US military. If so, it reveals surprisingly astute insight into the reasons for his honorable, but unavoidable, discharge.

No such fate awaits him in *The Realms* where, at the very least, he soon comes to function as a leader of men, a general in command of his own army. Even this enhanced status is not sufficient to protect him from defeat.

Surrounded as his army had been, Darger by means of most desperate efforts had extracted it out of the trap ... over three quarters of his army which had been 18,000,000 strong, the smallest army then in Glandelinia. The Glandelinian army opposed to him had only been 16,000,000 strong and had so disastrously defeated him ... Darger was seriously wounded, millions of prisoners were captured by the enemy ... and the losses of the christians was shocking.⁵⁶

Unaware of the underlying causes of the war, General Darger is occasionally confronted with perplexing images and personalities which awaken his fighting instinct. In an attack on a mysterious barn, Darger as author brilliantly embodies the various conflicting aspects of his psyche in powerful symbols.

In the midst of the battlefield was a large barn which had a large picture of the Aronburg child pictured or painted on the outside, and which was the headquarters of general Dargin the Glandelinian butcher. Against these gray wedges Darger threw his forces ... a shell blew part of the barn to pieces and Dargin was severely wounded by the fragments. The picture was unharmed ... Darger went into action with eight hundred thousand men, and lost nearly one hundred thousand. Beaten

several times as he was, Darger tried a general assault, being bound to capture the picture as all costs.⁵⁷

These fictional barns, which appear from time to time, were obviously connected in Henry's mind with a building that probably existed in Chicago, known as Schloeder's Barn, which once housed his mimic altar and the associated pictures of children. He consciously weaves these fragments of past reality into his story, tilting at barns like Don Quixote at windmills, with pictures of little girls, real and imaginary, cascading from the ruins.

... shells were also beginning to explode, the south wall of the western end of the shed was suddenly shattered to splinters, the roof was ripped away simultaneously, the glass in the window shattered, and doors thrown out by the concussion. The first swarm of pictures at the same time had been sent flying out a side door by the crash.⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, we are soon informed that the pictures belong to one of General Vivian's best generals, General Darger, "the one who really owned these pictures."

A painting entitled *After the Battle, Snider's Barn*, Leo Costelloes commemorates this important battle. It is set in a landscape filled with dead and wounded soldiers. Beautifully drawn in rust pink, the barn is shown as it appeared after the battle, with its windows broken and with a gaping hole in its side. In the yard are pieces of the smashed wooden wall, but no traces of the picture of Annie Aronburg. At the left we can see into the interior of the barn. A yellow room is revealed, with pictures on the wall and a black table. Is this Henry's version of his own room?

GOOD GENERAL DARGER'S participation in the great war is further complicated by the fact that he occasionally finds himself opposed in battle by his one-time friend William Schloeder, who is now fighting on the side of the enemy. Like Darger, Schloeder too exists simultaneously in good and bad versions of himself.

One of the biggest christian armies ever formed at this time was under the leadership of general Henry Joseph Darger, one of the best known christian generals Hanson ever had under his service. It was general Darger's purpose to bring up his armies with the intention of reinforcing general Hanson and Vivian at Phelantonburg, and help them capture the enemies' army that was half encircled there by the two christian armies ... Not far away was a large Glandelinian army but too inferior in size to be able to battle with general Darger's army without a disastrous defeat. This Glandelinian army was commanded by general Whilliam Schloeder, a wicked general ... horrible in character.⁵⁹

At this early stage in his storytelling, Henry seems to have taken special delight in creating an evil General Schloeder who he can encounter in battle. Perhaps the real Schloeder was still functioning in those days as Henry's only audience, with Darger consciously seeking to entertain his friend with images of him calculated to amuse. However, even at the end of the story, the two occasionally clash in battle without serious consequences. An example is provided by the Battle of Marie Pickford Junction in the final volume of *The Realms*.

The Glandelinians under Whilliam Schloeder attacked Henry Darger's armies with such savage fury that a good part of his lines was routed, but Darger annihilated the assailants at that point with his terrific cannon fire, and destroyed entirely the main right wing of Schloeder's army, and crushed his center to pieces. This battle raged for four days.

Being horribly defeated on the first day with the destruction of his one grand division, Schloeder being reinforced at night time by Henry Schloeder and Charles Mc-Farren, prepared to resume the conflict the next day, and did so, striking so heavily against the christian line that it seemed that all hell could not stop them ... During the evening of the fourth day of the engagement, the enemy received reinforcements, but on that day the christians attacked with herculean violence, and routed the foe who were unable to resist the frightful attack. Schloeder's army was scattered and routed, and Henry Darger's army was able to press on.⁶⁰

We know little of the nature of Darger's friendship with William Schloeder as it developed over the years. Schloeder remained unmarried and living with his family in Henry's neighborhood until the mid-1940s, but Darger refers to the friendship in the later part of *The Realms* almost as if it was a thing of the past, existing largely in memory. It seems unlikely that Schloeder could have maintained an interest in Darger's writing over the many years that work on *The Realms* continued. Nevertheless, Darger continued to find ways of incorporating his friend into the evolving story.

Toward the end of *The Realms* General Schloeder appears one last time. A final confrontation of these military embodiments of good and evil was perhaps inevitable; less predictable is the deeply moving outcome, a touching celebration of the real friendship these men had shared. The Vivian girls play an important part in this unusually human and deeply felt event.

Violet and her sisters watched the movements of the great christian armies under Darger with awe and amazement. How different he worked than general Evans or general Hanson. No wonder that Darger was a formidable foe.

The Glandelinian general Smith was too slow in his actions to satisfy the Glandelinian governments, and so he was withdrawn from command, and general Whilliam Schloeder was appointed to take command. He was a formidable foe to the christian armies, though in earlier days Darger and this Glandelinian soldier had once been the best of friends, and there

had not been hardly a single day or night that they had not seen each other, and had good times among each other.⁶¹

With true dramatic sense, Darger portrays the feelings of the two great generals, as each discovers who his opponent is.

Later on, when he learned who the new Glandelinian commander was, Darger became saddened, because he did not like to clash with his long time friend, who though still fighting on opposite sides, were as firm friends as ever. Schloeder, however, did not know, at first, who commanded the christian army opposed to him.⁶²

Following upon a charming scene in which he is rescued from an enraged bull by the ever altruistic Vivian girls, General Schloeder politely questions them.

"Would you mind telling me who is the leader of the christian army? I heard he is general Henry Darger, a friend of mine in early days. Is it true?" "Yes it is, general" answered Violet. The general said no more, but doffed his hat to them and went his way. Later, about two days, Violet and her sisters managing each to get a newspaper, the Glandelinian News, were surprised to read this article. "General Whilliam Schloeder the formidable Glandelinian general, and a fighter whom no christian army ever mustered against us for truth could whip, has resigned his command because his adversary general Henry Darger commanded the christian army..."⁶³

The Vivian girls understand at once. Jennie speaks:

"We know that he resigned because he would not fight against a friend he loved so well, no matter if he is a christian officer. And he acted wisely for doing so. A friend who fights a friend, even in time of war, is no friend ..."

General Darger was surprised when he saw this report in the paper, and was also glad, for a friend had refused to fight a friend.⁶⁴

General Henry Darger is, needless to say, well known to the Vivian sisters who look upon him as a trusted friend. Aware of his increasingly prominent role in the Christian army, they speak of him with respect. Darger's feelings for them are far more complicated, even ambivalent.

It was evidently perfect to general Darger that there was nothing whatever that could daunt the little girls and he did not know what to make of their bravery at all. To him, the little girls were not mere children. They seemed children with natures beyond comprehension, and whose bravery outrivalled the fiercest lions [lion's?] ... He almost feared the little girls himself. Pretty indeed as the prettiest angels, graceful in every form, but their looks showed indeed what they really were, and there was a peculiar light in their eyes which showed danger lurking there.⁶⁵

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The danger that General Darger senses may have less to do with the "peculiar light" in the little girls' eyes, than with feelings stirred up in him by their graceful forms. On the same page he admits to surprising urges which he associates with love. "Darger loved Violet and her sisters as strongly as Evans [their guardian] did though he hardly had them in his embrace as yet."⁶⁶ This statement is followed in the text by thirteen dots, four exclamation points, four dots, and four more exclamation points! It would seem that General Darger has far more in mind than brotherly love. He is obviously confused. Slightly later he returns to the puzzling urges he feels, a strange mixture of desire and awe.

Darger indeed admired Violet and her sisters, and at their first appearance he had been overawed, but nevertheless he had not been like Roswell Buster Johnston overshyed, and had spoke to them on the very first moment they came to him. He had longed to fold them in his strong arms, but this he did not exactly have the nerve to do, and yet he felt the desire almost irresistible. He had heard every detail of the experiences of the little girls now before him, how they had outwitted the enemy so often, how much they suffered, how they had been almost assassinated at the bloody battle of Brigano, and hundreds of other things already described in the story. He wondered how they could have endured it all as they did.⁶⁷

Needless to say, nothing happens, and it is left to Darger's alter ego, Marco Schoefield Penrod, to carry these powerful desires into action. It has to be admitted that this Darger is the author's most complex creation, in that he embodies a surprising range of human feelings. In his confused response to his friend and enemy Schloeder, and in his richly ambivalent reactions to the Vivian girls, he emerges as a believable embodiment of aspects of Darger's reality. A visit to General Darger in hospital serves to illustrate Henry's delight in self-portraiture.

Violet and her sisters before entering the tent went to see general Darger who was said to be wounded. It took them ten minutes to reach the base hospital on foot. Partly covered by a shell sheet on a cot in one corner of the ward was a man. The face was and features were darkly sunburned, but the lighter hue of his cleanly shaven pate identified him as the general. He was smoking a cigarette and looking at the ceiling when Violet and her sisters entered ... Violet was the first to interrupt as she stepped forward with outstretched hand to grasp the extended one of general Henry Darger, one of Mansions chief staff officers, followed suit by her sisters. Besides his reputation of being one of the most profound generals of the army, Henry Darger had come up from the ranks, winning his commission in the early days of June, 1912.⁶⁸

PERHAPS, as Henry approached the end of *The Realms*, he sought to give expression to more of his humanity: his longings, his loneliness, and his feelings of sadness and loss. These feelings find expression in one additional and surprising aspect of the final volumes, the unexpected appearance of his father and his uncles in the great battles on Glandelinian soil which bring the story to its conclusion.

One of the confusing aspects of Darger's reality, and a factor which must have puzzled him deeply as a child, was the fact that he and his father shared the same name, Henry Joseph Darger. This shared identity may have made it difficult for him, as a boy, to establish a sense of separateness from his father, and certainly complicated the mourning process at his death. Sixteen years old when his father died, Henry undoubtedly experienced his departure as a partial loss of himself. Aware that his father had abandoned him, he would have been troubled in any case with powerful ambivalent feelings which necessitated serious internal divisions in his perception of his father and himself. These internal rifts (self-fragments) find expression in the multiplicity of Dargers in *The Realms*. They are further reflected in the final volumes, when two Henry Joseph Dargers suddenly appear on the battlefield, along with Charles and Augustine Darger, his uncles. The resulting confusion for the reader may parallel Henry's own confusion as a boy as he tried to sort out the Dargers in his own family.

In the midst of the Battle of Marcucian, we are suddenly aware of a possibility we have never contemplated before.

... so fierce was the resistance of the enemy, and so terrific was the fire that the christians met, that it is probable that a most serious disaster would have occurred, had it not been for the arrival of a portion of Darger's army which was advancing that way, and followed by his brother's, August Darger's.⁶⁹

So great is our surprise at encountering Henry's dead father on the battlefield that, for a moment, we actually find ourselves wondering if the Henry J. Darger who we have been reading about for fifteen volumes, and some 15,000 pages, might always have been Darger senior. As usual, the author relishes the bombshell he has dropped and the confusion he has unleashed in us. He deliberately plays with the chaos he has created. What are we to make of the following observation made by Evans? "It's those two Dargers that I depend upon wholly to carry the war through to a success for us. They can do it too, I'll wager."⁷⁰ The Vivian girls add to the confusion:

The main fellows to be dreaded just now is those two generals called Henry and Augustine Darger. Harry Darger is another dangerous adversary, and his cousin Harry or Joe Sparr. They have been making advances and movements that are not only puzzling us but the whole world.⁷¹

Ultimately we realize that Darger, father and son, are now present on some occasions. But, because of the similarities of the names we can never be quite sure who is who. At the Battle of Pegasus, for example, we are reassured when we encounter our Henry fighting alongside of his uncles, though it is unclear whether his father is present too.

A little after Evan's engagement at Tantermergo, general Henry Darger had made a junction with his uncle's army and came into a severe clash at Pegasus ... the enemy under Dennon had been prepared for his advance, and struck against August Darger's armies first, almost destroying it and carrying all before them. The Glandelinian cannon fire had been terrific and almost annihilated August Darger's armies ... Tward that time Henry Darger's armies had come upon the fields ... the Glandelinians were taken wholly by surprise, but nevertheless recovered from the confusion and resisted the assailants bravely. They would probably have won, even then, but Henry Darger in the meantime had sent Charles Darger around to strike the enemies' rear, and these Abbieannian columns came upon the flank of the foe like a roaring avalanche.⁷²

Darger's attitude toward his uncles finds expression in a number of subtle ways. On March 10, 1915, a letter is sent to General Henry Darger. It opens with a congratulatory statement: "I am glad to know that you are leaving for Glandelinia with your armies tomorrow to begin an invasion of the country of the enemy of God."⁷³ Several paragraphs later we discover that the Henry Darger addressed is in fact Darger senior, as the letter raises grave concerns about his brother August.

It has been your word that your assistant, general August Darger, wanted to resign his command and return home. Don't let him disgrace himself by doing any such thing at this critical time, tell him to be a man ... Look at the many wealthy young men your brother has in the army with him, all his staff general officers ... This ought to inspire general August Darger with more courage, and he is getting a nice salary of 1,567 dollars a month for his services ... I am sending you some paper clippings and pictures of the Vivian girls, and of their heroic doings, which I would like you to give to your brother when you meet him again."⁷⁴

August Darger decides not to resign, and 300 pages later he is killed on the battlefield.⁷⁵ The Vivian girls observe: "August Darger was killed, and our friend Henry seriously wounded ... Charles Darger who is now in command cannot hold out much longer." The year is 1916, the year in which Darger's uncle August in fact died. Once again, a fragment of reality finds its way into the Realms of the Unreal.⁷⁶

IN EXAMINING Henry Darger's fictional participation in *The Realms of the Unreal*, we have been forced to recognize that the issue is incredibly complex, with fragmentary selves occupying distinct, but occasionally overlapping, spaces in the story. Other variant Dargers (Dargin, Henry Dargerina, generals Hendry Darger and Judas Darger) emerge briefly, only to disappear. The Dargers we have investigated in some detail — good and bad generals Darger, Darger the war correspondent, Dargar the leader of the Gemini and scientist, as well as H. J. Darger author of *The Realms* — can be distinguished with conviction as more or less distinct entities, differing from one another in more ways than they approximate each other. All share a common name, or variant thereof, and ultimately perhaps they are all one. Darger acknowledges this when on several occasions he signs himself, "H. J. Darger, Manager of War Correspondents News, General of the Abbieannian National Guard, Geminian member," leaving out only his darker self, the Glandelinian Darger who fights on the side of the enemy.⁷⁷

The bond which links all of these Dargers, including those who fight on the side of evil, is ownership, and possible authorship, of the volumes containing the history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war, along with a group of pictures of little girls which we associate with Henry's room in Chicago. The loss of one of those pictures, that of Annie Aronburg, mysteriously provides the fundamental pretext for the war (see chapter 9). Ownership of these items is ultimately claimed by each of the Dargers in *The Realms* and, on the title page, by Darger himself. The discovery of the volumes in the *Realms of the Unreal* is a source of great confusion.

In the final volume of *The Realms*, Jack Evans, unconvincingly, attempts to impose order on chaos, and to explain the contradictory claims, while admitting that the fundamental problem has not been, and will not be, resolved. Speaking of their enemy, evil General Darger, he says:

"As for his losses in property, how can he claim they were his in the first place? Everything depicted that he lost rightly belonged to Gemini Darger who fights on our side, and which he had given to you little girls as presents. This Glandelinian fool had stolen them from this man himself, and tried to claim they were his right property. General Darger fighting for our side was the real loser not him. But then that picture always mentioned has never been recovered and probably never will. But I doubt if it really has any effect upon this war. It could not the way we are progressing now...."⁷⁸

Alter Egos and Their Shadows

When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were and the souls of the dead from whom we sprang come and shower upon us their riches and their spells, asking to be allowed to contribute to the new emotions which we feel and in which, erasing their former image, we recast them in an original creation.

—Proust⁷⁹

Henry Darger is present to a certain extent in all the characters in *The Realms*. While this is, paradoxically, especially true of the female heroines, connections between Darger and the various male characters are more easily recognized, particularly if they bear a variant of his name. However, the various Dargers, Dargins, and Dargaruses actually play a very minor role in the narrative, occupying far less space than we might expect of self-images born of fantasy. Males in general, despite their presence in the millions as participants on both sides of the great conflict, possess little importance as individuals in the story. Even the more prominent or "ranking" members of the otherwise anonymous masses of soldiers exist in name only. In the case of the, for the most part, nameless and faceless Glandelinians, that anonymity protected Darger, avoiding any hint of a connection between their murderous destructiveness toward little girls and any similar tendency in his own psyche.

A small number of Christian boy heroes do, however, come to occupy a position of real importance in *The Realms*, attaining their unique status primarily because of their ability to relate to the heroines of the story with a degree of easy familiarity, even intimacy, far surpassing anything that Darger himself was capable of. Each of them is an embodiment of certain aspects of Darger, with each of these heroes functioning as a sort of alter ego or representative of Darger in the Realms of the Unreal.

Not surprisingly, given the major defensive splits in Darger's fragmented psyche, these alter ego figures appear in the story in pairs: light and dark halves of a shattered and irreconcilable whole. It is this tendency for some important male characters to possess what might be termed "shadow selves" which permits us to recognize them as embodiments of Darger's conflicted identity, carriers of his painfully subdivided experience of self into the unreality of *The Realms*.⁸⁰

Mr. Mutt and Mr. Jeff

The most readily recognizable male pair making regular "guest appearances" in the story are the two Professional International Spies, Mr. Mutt and Mr. Jeff. Borrowed from the famous American comic strip by Bud Fisher, these unpleasant and notoriously slippery characters have no connection, other than a similarity of appearance, to "Mutt and Jeff" of the newspapers.⁸¹ Far from being influenced by the comic strip, Darger suggests at one point that his characters are somehow responsible for the appearance of the daily strip in American newspapers.

"This message which if you don't believe me I'll even let you read, comes from some strange private individual and, of course, cannot be regarded by me as official. He claims to be one man who says he's the Original 'Mutt' who caused those sort of funnies to be made in some Foreign papers ..."⁸²

While Darger undoubtedly enjoyed the humor implicit in these comic characters, he set out at once to change them totally. They turn up early in the story as unscrupulous foreigners employed by the Glandelinians as spies. Although the children occasionally recognize them, and know them to be enemy infiltrators, they move about the Christian camps with impunity and generally escape detection or capture. Surprisingly, Darger tells us that Mutt and Jeff are Catholics, and therefore, unlike the Glandelinians, are able to make use of the Christian "countersign," the sign of the cross, to enter the army and girl scout camps undetected.

"Now how on earth did that fellow that looks so much like 'Mutt' in the Daily News Comics of America contrive to get amongst the refugees — and though he or his 'Jeff' companion did not seem to fear Penrod, he did fear the child scouts, and more so Violet and her sisters, whom he never had dared to meddle with or encounter ... Then too he may have received some masked telegram or a signal code, or other message, which told him that as long as he kept away from child scout encampments or the Vivian Girls, he and his companion would be safe in their work ...

"But first I'll have to ask you a question. Did you ever look at any funny papers over in your own country before you came here?"

"Yes Sir."

"The Mutt and Jeff Jokes of the Daily Newspapers?"

"Yes."

"Well in natural looks the man appears like him ... He's got the nature of the Glandelinians even if he ain't one, and hates girls of the christian sides worse than boys."⁸³

In every encounter with these treacherous foreigners, Darger reminds us of their physical similarity to the characters in the American funny papers. It seems that it was precisely this physical resemblance which accounted for their significance to him. Darger's borrowings were invariably over-terminated. Henry and his pal, William Schloeder, were remarkably dissimilar in build. Henry was small, his friend William very tall (see plate 1.20, 1.21). To those who knew them as inseparable

companions, they may well have come to be known as "Mutt and Jeff." In this comic disguise the two friends found their way into *The Realms*. Since the comparison was based only on chance similarities of appearance, there was no need to borrow the personal characteristics of the comic book heroes. As with all of his borrowed characters, Darger felt free to invent totally different personalities, corresponding to his own needs. In time we learn that both spies are of European origin.

"... the 'Mutt Fellow' was a man from Spain, and military manager for general Richardson Raymond Federal, Glandelinia's highest commanding general, and that the little 'Jeff' fellow was a man of Italy, but really not of that nationality though he had lived there for a long time, but was really a man of Irish birth, and was the head of the largest band of Glandelinian spies in the Glandelinian army, and that Mutt was his aid."⁸⁴

This embroidery on the theme, so typical of Darger, may be of importance in that the friendship of Henry and William could, in part, have been based on their common foreign origin: Darger born of a German father, and Schloeder said to have been born and raised in Luxembourg.

Another point of similarity between Jeff, as a character in the comic strip, and Darger, derives from an admittedly esoteric detail having to do with the origins of this comic strip. It is a detail which Darger may or may not have known, but if he did it was undoubtedly significant. The strip originated in 1907. It only gained national fame and syndication a year later when the character of Jeff was invented. Actually, Jeff was "found" by Mutt, in, of all places, an insane asylum, and "adopted" by him on the spot as his friend.⁸⁵ This link with Henry's past — he had escaped from his asylum and came to Chicago in 1909 — is a deeply meaningful coincidence, and would easily account for his intense identification with Mr. Jeff.

It is striking that, from the beginning, Darger tended to increase the importance of Jeff in his version of the story, reversing the underdog role he played in the strip as a naive and unintelligent foil to the scheming Mutt. In *The Realms*, Mr. Jeff, the short member of the team, and therefore Darger's representative, emerges as the clearly dominant and more intelligent partner of this team of spies.

"I presumed once ... to ask you a question about the small spy called the personality of the Jeff fellow in the funnies. Whether he meant more for the Glandelinian generals than the bigger fellow, or whether he was the main one ..."

"The bigger fellow who resembles 'Mutt' never meant so much and couldn't do a thing if it wasn't for his leader the smaller fellow. I know it now — and since that day I have learned so much about them, they don't act like Mutt and Jeff in the 'funnies,' and neither are they any true individuals. They're Foreign, they'll work for any nation to get the money. And they charge enough to get rich too."⁸⁶

Darger emphasizes the dominance of Jeff repeatedly, to the point that the two partners become a contrasting pair in more than size, with Jeff more competent, keenly intelligent, and dangerous, Mutt a mere follower. To what extent this accords with the real relationship between Henry and his friend Schloeder, we do not know. Mutt and Jeff are the only pair in *The Realms* who serve exclusively on the side of the enemy, and whose relations with the Vivian girls and their friends are both distant and hostile.

"The one who resembles 'Jeff,' if the ringleader of every one of the dangerous Glandelinian spies, is a very bad man, who has engaged in hundreds of interprizes of a very suspicious nature, whereby he and his bigger comrade the 'Mutt' spy, have always made big money, and even made suckers of many Glandelinian generals. He has also a reputation of being a great assassin of children, as well as many other things that are a decidedly dangerous for the cause."⁸⁷

Walter Starring: Boy Investigator

Although Darger participates in *The Realms* as an adult in various fictional guises (Jeff is described as "a little short man of fifty"), it was as a boy that he most needed to enter the Unreal.⁸⁸ The boy heroes who represent him in the story, each of whom is good-looking, intelligent, physically strong, and uniquely confident, embody varying aspects of the marvelous boy he had wished all his life to be. It was as an environment for this ideal youth, who still lived in his mind, that the Realms of the Unreal had been called into being. There he could be an extraordinary child among extraordinary children, when, as an adult in the real world, he could hardly be said to exist.

In childhood Darger's intelligence, indeed his very sanity, had been decisively questioned. Intelligence, therefore, mattered to him terribly. While all of his child heroes are bright, the most intelligent by far is the thoughtful and scholarly boy scientist and investigator, Walter John Starring.⁸⁹ Even his appearance betrays a degree of seriousness and intellectual assurance rare in a child.

Walter Starring's face bore an expression of easy good temper and holiness. Though a boy he wore hair with long curls. He had a soldier's bearing, his complexion was tanned, and though handsome of face, he looked a touch military fighter and strong. His eyebrows were black and bushy ... Starring, who being of the military, always rides or walks with his head thrown back, and yet a strong air of looking down on all wicked things as a child detests a dirty tasting medicine.⁹⁰

As we get to know Walter he seems to age. However, a depiction of him in the collage-drawings presents us with a little boy of six or seven dressed incongruously in a purple snowsuit (plate 9.3). This, needless to say, in no way interferes with his being a boy scout leader, a guardian of the Vivian girls, a general, and the commander of his own armies. Not about to acknowledge a problem, Darger comments: "Walter Starring was more of a man than a boy, despite his young age and five feet tall."⁹¹

STARRING ENTERS *The Realms* in a significant way about halfway through the story. He is asked by the Vivian girls to lead a scientific expedition to the destroyed city of Abbieann in Calverinia.⁹² His skills as an investigator and scientist quickly become evident. It is possible that some aspects of his character are based on the activities of another boy detective with whom Darger was familiar, Tom Swift.⁹³ On the other hand, Starring's insights into the workings of nature are not unlike the scientific understanding of Hendro Dargar, of whom he might almost seem to be a younger version. Confronted with the ruins of Abbieann and its surrounding territories, he immediately initiates research designed to disprove the theory that the massive explosions of June 1, 1913, which decimated much of Calverinia, were the result of volcanic eruption. His investigation, which goes on for hundreds of pages in three volumes, draws on seismological and geodetic observations, evidence of major changes in the earth's magnetic field, aerial undulations that circle the globe, seismic waves at sea, shifts in elevation of the land mass, and the darkening of the sun due to smoke entering the upper atmosphere and shrouding part of the planet. In creating the character of Walter Starring, Darger made use

of his own extensive readings concerning natural disasters of all kinds. This is an obsession he and Starring share.

Darger stated to Starring that it is estimated that in the Libraries of the Whole Civilized World there are more than two or three thousand works treating of different arguments of the earthquakes and other natural disasters. But this phenomenon [the explosion at Abbieann] is greatly strange to all of them.⁹⁴

AMONG THE MOST spectacular, and obviously symbolic, events connected with the destruction of Abbieann is the disturbing fact that, as a result of the midnight explosion, a huge portion of the city breaks off and sinks beneath the waters of the harbor. Millions of lives are lost. This disappearance of much of Abbieann necessitates Walter's descent in a diving suit, to explore what is now an underwater city of the dead. As we will see, what is involved is a descent into Darger's unconscious, and the return of the repressed.

Some time later Starring decided to explore the remains of Abbieann covered by a part of the lake. One trial was attempted by him, diving underwater as long as he could. He came back to the surface soon, and stated that there was surely a sea of buildings under water ... He said many houses were full of drowned persons, half skeletons by now. This was evident, a good section of Abbieann, the size of New York, was thrown under the lake by the explosion shocks. Starring was more dumbfounded than ever, and in his diving suit he made many explorations.⁹⁵

Darger himself seems to have sensed the presence of unexplained and uncomfortable echoes from the past in this passage and, as always when he found himself in such a situation, he reminds himself that this is only fiction. "I also repeat that so far as this story accepted as for fiction is concerned." But then, amazingly, he turns to ancient history in his search for legendary parallels to the contemporary disaster.

Yet nevertheless there is in real history no record of a catastrophe equally sudden and decisive for an exact counterpart. In this particular we should have to go back to the tradition respecting the lost Atlantis which was related by the Egyptian priests to Plato, and according to which the inhabitants of a great and enormous island that once existed in the Atlantic to the west of the straits of Hercules, were exterminated by cyclonic flames attending volcanic eruptions. If we regard this legend as embodying historic fact, this cataclysm occurred thousands of years ago.⁹⁶

Starring's familiarity with mythological parallels to the destruction of Abbieann is only equaled by that of the author of *The Realms*. Darger seems to have been an expert on the historical background to his modern epic, and he used it to enrich his tale of destruction.

Once when Starring had ascended the highest ruin of the city which gave him a full view of the surrounding country, the smoke of the whole state seemed to go up as the smoke of a furnace. Starring almost fancied he was back in olden Bible days and was a personator of Lot and was viewing Sodom and Gommorrah and all the land of the plain after God had over-

thrown those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. He fancied that what is left of Abbieann was Gommorrah and that what he had seen of Adeleheid was Sodom, and that God had rained fire and brimstone down upon the whole country and that he and his followers were a witness of it all ... He wondered if it had not been a sudden volcanic eruption from the very plains like that which in one night destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculanuemn.⁹⁷

At the request of Emperor Robert Vivian, Hendro Dargar also leads an expedition, of the members of the Gemini, into the region around Abbieann. Why two expeditions? As it turns out, both Starring and Darger are members of the Gemini. At one point Walter is described as "a sergeant colonel of the Gemini" and, significantly, as "a personal friend of Darger."⁹⁸

"The Gemini, yes," he said, "I am one of the members. Violet and her sisters coaxed me to join. I am out to get the information that even the whole world is seeking, to capture those who might have had a hand in it; as they are the greatest of murderers."⁹⁹

At times it does appear that Hendro Dargar and Walter Starring are overlapping characters, fulfilling identical functions in *The Realms*. This is not the case, but it becomes essential to inquire more deeply into the reasons for Starring's existence. How and why does he function as Darger's alter ego in *The Realms*?

The answer to this question only becomes apparent as we obtain further insight into the psychological implications of this vast story within a story. As we proceed it will become evident that Darger was obsessed throughout his life with cataclysm, and that he entertained troubling visions of natural and manmade destruction on a scale far surpassing anything in human history. The destruction of Abbieann and its eight million inhabitants, along with numerous other cities in Calverinia, can only be compared with a nuclear holocaust. Darger actually uses the term holocaust. Thousands of pages of *The Realms* are devoted to pathologically detailed accounts of disasters of all kinds. Why was a boy hero invented by Darger to deal with all of this?

"I seek to find out who made the floods, who ordered them, who defiled the country by these disasters? It is more difficult than any quest made, but those who diligently seek for it will win out. They must, or the cause is lost. If Violet and her sisters cannot succeed, I must."¹⁰⁰

The symbolic implications, and the terrible urgency of Starring's quest, became disturbingly evident to me when I discovered that, in attempting to embody these dark and frightening events in a form surpassing cold naturalism or scientific objectivity, Darger had turned to one of the great works of world literature, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, at this point in *The Realms* he began to incorporate, chapter by chapter, the whole of this enormous book, adopting and modifying every line to suit his own purposes, his deepest needs. Far from plagiarism, this is the single, most impressive, and necessary, act of "borrowing" in *The Realms*. Bunyan's poetry, his

allegorical style, his vision of a difficult voyage from darkness to light, is adapted flawlessly to accompany Starring in his quest for the truth.¹⁰²

The following passage is lifted and adapted from the "Madam Bubble scene" which forms part of Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but with the sex of the witch changed.

As I was thus musing, I met with one of very pleasant attire, that presented himself to me, and offered three things, to wit, a lot of money, honor and glory if I would leave the region and not say anything to anyone. Now the truth is I was very weary and sleepy, I am also very poor having lost all in the flood ... if I would abide by his wishes, he would make me a rich man. "For" said he, "I am famous the world over, and I have lots of money to give away." ... "Without doubt, his designs were bad," said Angeline Richee, "But now you talk of him, I believe I have either seen him, or have read something about him."¹⁰³

The parallel passage in Bunyan reads as follows:

"But let me go on in my tale: As I was thus musing, as I said, there was one in very pleasant attire, but old, that presented herself unto me, and offered me three things, to wit, her body, her purse, and her bed. Now the truth is, I was both aweary, and sleepy, I am also poor as a howlet, and that, perhaps, the witch knew ... Then she made offers again, and said that if I would be ruled by her, she would make me great and happy. 'For,' said she, 'I am the mistress of the world, and men are made happy by me.' Then I asked her her name, and she

told me it was Madam Bubble. (Honest) Without doubt her designs were bad. But stay, now you talk of her, methinks I either have seen her, or have read some story of her."¹⁰⁴

AS STARRING (Christian) travels through a world destroyed — cities blown to pieces and fallen into the sea, forests erupting in an endless fire storm, the land sinking beneath vast floods — we begin to suspect that more is involved than nature on a rampage. Starring's deepest preoccupation is with endlessly probing into huge craters in the earth, somehow the mysterious source of the deadly explosions. The decimated landscape covered with incinerated, dismembered, and decomposing bodies, which Starring investigates during the fall of 1913, slowly undermines his mood, inundating his boyish good spirits in a sea of depression, until he seems, almost, to understand.

All of this scenery of disaster may seem interesting, and worth exploring for, by many, I suppose, but it has left to me a forlorn melancholic feeling, something of a feeling that tells of a sad occurrence of a dreadful event of the past which the world itself could not atone for.¹⁰⁵

It is unlikely that either Darger or Starring knew of the "sad occurrence," the "dreadful event of the past," which lay beneath the ruins. That event occurred in Darger's boyhood, and it resulted in the destruction of his world. Starring's function in *The Realms* is to be the boy that Darger was then; to be alive amidst the ruins, to feel what Darger felt, and to try to understand.

Amongst the thousands and thousands of images invented by Darger to embody the sudden and overwhelming destruction of the people of Abbieann, there is one, senseless, even crazy, that stands out.

"He described even of a woman being burned to death, with a living baby girl in her arms, and that it seemed as if the whole world was afire."¹⁰⁶

Had Darger been able to contemplate this sad spectacle for a moment longer, he might have recognized in the charred body of the woman, with her living baby — his own mother and sister. The cataclysm with which he was obsessed was his own; the boy hero Walter Starring, his own small self.

Walter's Dark Brother: Gerald Starring

... the spark of life can flash only between two contrary poles, and ... it is larger and more beautiful the greater the distance between them and the richer the opposition with which each pole is charged.

—André Gide¹⁰⁷

Starring's shadow side is represented by his brother Gerald, a boy scout leader who fights on the side of the Glandelinians. He is as bad as Walter is good, yet Darger's portrait of him is surprisingly subtle, a study in the psychology of the delinquent.

According to all christian boy and girlscouts and generals too, he was a bad and dangerous boy scout, but he was a good young lad to gaze upon, even in his careless attire as a Vagabond boy.

He came along sauntering down the street ... Even guileless gaiety made even more apparent innocence in his small boyish suntanned face. But his secret young mind even for his age was dark with deadly even almost wicked thoughts, for he was even mediating stealthy and slick schemes, as he strolled along, looking carefully at every child slave, especially of the girls and others he met, and even watching carefully, so carefully, Glandelinian girlscouts, that they wondered what was the matter with him. Gerald Starring's clever brain was busy indeed with most dangerous designs.¹⁰⁸

Darger takes real delight in making use of the shared family name to sow confusion in the mind of his readers as to which Starring they are dealing with at any one time. Both Starrings occasionally appear on stage at the same time and, while not twins, they are sufficiently alike to be confused with one another. It is obvious, though never suggested in the story, that they are parts of a single personality, and that behind them both lurks the boy Henry Darger, who once lived with his father in Chicago. It is sufficient that even at this early point in his development a split was present in his psyche, a division clearly reflected in the characters of the good and bad boy Starrings. Walter Starring has nothing in the way of normal fraternal feelings for his wicked brother. Fighting on opposite sides in the war, they are completely at odds.

Walter Starring made a speech to them all. He told how the Vivian Girls had been continually and unjustly abused by Gerald Starring, and how he had attempted many times to cause their destruction.¹⁰⁹

Like his brother Walter, Gerald is attracted to the opposite sex. However, because he is unable to respond with warmth and affection to specific little girls, his sexual feelings, awakened by anonymous children, seem to confuse and disturb him.

Near the house sat a strange ragged girl. He saw her, then suddenly as before and always to his surprise and chagrin, he experienced that same odd breathless excitement at sight of the little girl, felt the same fearsome throbbing trouble in his heart, and a swift heat in his boyish cheeks, at the mere nearness of this little strange tanned skinned young ragged girl.¹¹⁰

As is the case with many of the Glandelinians, the beauty of little girls provokes Gerald to violence. The Vivian girls are his particular enemies, and most of his appearances in *The Realms* have to do with assaults on them, or on one or another of their girl scout friends. Given his brother Walter's romantic attraction to Angelina Aronburg (which we have not yet encountered), it is certainly significant that it is specifically this girl who awakens the greatest intensity of aggressive feelings in Gerald. Undoubtedly, he is also attracted to her. "Now the one thing in all the world that Gerald Starring really feared was Angelina Aronburg."¹¹¹ A bold and courageous, if bad, boy scout, in situations of stress he tends to outbursts of uncontrolled rage. His response to fear is to attack. In a marvelously choreographed fight in a barn, Starring takes on both Gertrude Angeline (another name for Angelina Aronburg) and Penrod, chief leader of the Christian boy scouts. Each of the participants is aware that this is a fight to the death:

... at that very moment taking the initiative, he sprang like a enraged little tiger. Glandelinian boy scouts will hit a girl sooner than he will any boy when enraged, when the girl happens to be a girl scout enemy, and his fists dashed full into Angeline's face, right and left altogether or almost together, with as great a force as he could bring to bear. The force of the blows flung her backwards, her head struck the edge of the stall behind her, and receiving a kick from him into her stomach, she dropped moaning to the floor and lay there ...

As Gerald swung sideways he saw a long dangerous looking knife gleaming in Gertrude's right hand, and the looks in her eyes was anything but pleasant. Good as she was, she was a little Rattler when aroused ... He thrust her arm up, and the blow diverted, glanced, the knife ripping his sleeve open from wrist to shoulder. Penrod also with a knife was spring from the other side, demanding;

"Surrender you fool or I'll jab you in the side."

But Gerald seized upon the situation with judgement for which he could never afterwards account. Dashing his fist upward, he caught Gertrude Angeline under the chin, forcing her head back and getting a good tight strangle hold, so tight that her tongue protruded. At the same time he grasped the wrist which held the long gleaming knife, and swung so as to interpose the girlscout's body between himself and Penrod's blow. As Penrod struck again, Gerald turned with a curse, sheltering himself behind Gertrude Angeline, one hand still encircling her throat in the strangle grip, the other holding back the wrist which she was struggling most vehemently to use so that Penrod's short mad stabbing strokes always fell short aimed around Gertrude's body ... Gerald in this manner continued to ward off Penrod's furious attacks ... But he had no more than fifteen seconds in which to think out his next desperate move ... Suddenly the Glandelinian boy scout made up his mind. He suddenly released Gertrude,

flinging her backwards with all his might. Gertrude fell against Penrod, sending him staggering, the two clawed at each other, and fell to the floor.¹¹²

Not surprisingly, Gerald's attack on Gertrude Angeline takes the form of the typical Glandelinian sadistic assault on little girls, where the emphasis is on strangulation. But this particular little girl is no child slave, but a trained fighter, well able to defend herself.

ALTHOUGH GERALD STARRING is capable of extraordinary violence and regularly indulges this capacity, Darger still can't bring himself to dismiss him as a figure of pure Glandelinian evil. As bad as Gerald is, Darger holds out hope for his eventual reform. He tries to account for his actions, and sees his wickedness as somehow comprehensible. Emerging from the woods to confront a group of Angelinian girl scouts, Starring announces himself boldly:

"Why, I'm Gerald Starring of general Manley's boy scout legions ..."

Angeline Richee realizing at once that she and her friends were facing the dreaded leader of all the Glandelinian boy scouts did not answer at once. They knew that in his ways the boy was perfectly just, and righteous, and was fooled by Manley and therefore not being wicked, was very daring, and not to be trifled with.¹¹³

Toward the end of the story, Gerald Starring is captured, if only briefly, and an attempt is made to discover "why he persecutes the Vivian Girls without reason." The children, including Penrod and Gertrude Angeline, are ready to forgive and forget, if only Gerald will admit the error of his ways.

Although Darger assures us that Starring, "in his heart ... liked and respected pretty little girls," Gerald remains obdurate, unwilling or unable to apologize. Darger understands and defends Gerald Starring because he recognizes in him the troubled boy he once was. While depicting him as a source of endless mischief, he seeks repeatedly to invent excuses for his wicked ways.¹¹⁴ One of those excuses comes suggestively close to home. Gerald travels with two lieutenants, one of whom is Frederick Darger, a Glandelinian boy scout and spy, and in real life Henry's cousin.¹¹⁵ One of the explanations for why a basically good boy like Gerald should have gone astray is that he has been misled by these evil companions. Even the Vivian girls accept this rationale.

The little girls had a short interview with Starring, and then the next morning went to intercede for him, telling general Hanson that it was mostly the fault of the lad's two companions who had misled him ... they should be the ones to pay, as they caused Starring to do what he did, by false statements against them.¹¹⁶

General Hanson, older and wiser, is not taken in. He sees through the excuses, rejecting any possibility that Gerald might change his character.

"He caused you as much trouble as any of the wicked Glandelinian generals did, and when he was captured once or twice before, your father allowed him pardon at your request, and see how he repaid you? No, all your pleas for him is in vain now. You could cry yourselves to death, and it would not save him."¹¹⁷

The Vivian girls' memories of their various persecutions by Starring seem to be curiously shortlived. A collage-drawing, entitled *After Marcocino. Violet and her sisters capture Gerald Starring and his two companions, and then ...*, reminds us of an occasion when they themselves managed to take him into custody¹¹⁸ (5.2).

We might wish to consider whether there are important parallels between the Darger and Vivian families, and whether these disputes in *The Realms* reflect upsetting events which once disrupted Darger's family. At present, nothing is known about Frederick Darger's actual role in Henry's life, since he never speaks of him. All we can say with certainty is that Gerald Starring represents an important aspect of Henry's early experience, probably embodying some of the aspects of his character and behavior which finally led to his being sent to the Mercy Home for Boys.

Gerald's encounter with the Vivian girls does cause him, briefly, to contemplate reform. Something in him is stirred by these mysteriously beautiful children, and his better side surfaces.

It was the first time that Starring had ever seen Violet and her sisters at such close quarters, and never before had he realized their dazzling beauty, their spiritual eyes, and such holy innocence. And he also noticed that something like a halo circled dimly above their heads, and he arose politely yet awed in their sudden presence.¹¹⁹

Deeply emotional, and confused by his ambivalent feelings toward the little girls, Gerald momentarily repents. Jack Evans explains:

"He told me all and told me that now he does see his folly, though he never expects forgiveness from general Vivian. He has been weeping for days because you little girls were so harsh with him, and he told me that he would give anything, even his life, if you little girls forgave him."¹²⁰

We are reminded of a similarly unconvincing conversion in Darger's life, when he went from hating baby children, mostly little girls, to loving and protecting them. Gerald's reformation lasts for less than a page, after which he makes his escape, and once again turns on the Vivian sisters with the unrepentant fury of a wild animal.¹²¹

Romance in *The Realms*

Walter Starring shares Darger's fondness for little girls. He is listed, in fact, as one of the three guardians of the Vivian sisters, charged with protecting them from harm.¹²² He is disturbed by their beauty.

In his soul, he had enshrined even Gertrude and the Vivian Girls as lovely roses easily crushed, easily destroyed, a sweet line of treasures to be guarded from all such horrors of a crazy war, a number of little violet creatures as fragile as they were brave and loyal.¹²³

The inclusion of Gertrude Angeline's name in this enumeration of treasures enshrined in Walter's heart is significant in that throughout *The Realms* he displays a strange partiality to her, and she to him. Chief of all the girl scout forces, she is an unusually powerful and determined young lady.¹²⁴ Walter's romantic feelings for Gertrude surpass anything Darger himself was capable of feeling or,

at least, of acting upon. He allows his boy hero all kinds of intimate encounters with this little girl, exciting experiences which he could never have permitted himself to enjoy. Throughout the war, these two children find time to be alone together. Interestingly, it is Gertrude who initiates these encounters, overcoming Walter's inhibitions in the sexual sphere.

It was late in the morning of the next day that two unusual things suddenly or gradually happened ... one that he had prepared himself for ... and another so unexpected, that for a space it could have sent his world of worlds crashing out of their orbits. With Gertrude Angeline he had gone to a ridge line for particular flowers she had desired, which he found two miles back from the big river. Returning a new way, they came to a shallow stream, and therefore Gertrude Angeline stood at the edge of it, and there was laughter in her shining eyes, as she looked to the other side of it. She had twined flowers into her hair. Her cheeks were even richer in color than usual, and her slim figure was very exquisite in its wild impulse of life. Suddenly, she turned on him, her red lips smiling in his face.

"Will you carry me across?" she asked. He did not answer, for he was trembling as he drew near her. She raised her arms a little while she waited. And then he picked her up, she being against his breast. Her two hands went to his shoulders as he waded into the stream, he slipped, and they clung a little tighter. The soft note of laughter was in her throat when the current came to his knees out in the middle

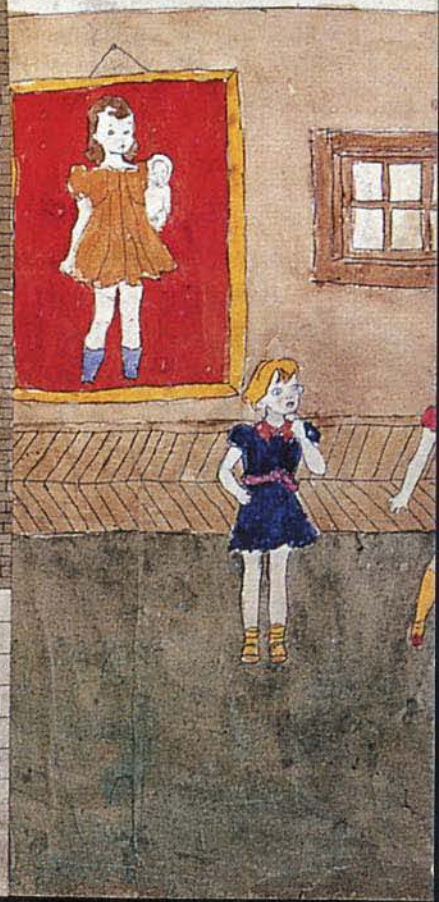
5.2

Henry Darger

After Marcocino. Violet and her sisters capture Gerald Starring and his two companions, and then—. Center panel of a three-panel composition. 19 x 70 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner

action lines with them

after marciano
Violet and her sisters capture
Gerald Stanley and his two companions,
and then —



of the stream. He held her much tighter, and then, stupidly, he slipped again, and the movement brought her much lower in his arms, so for a space her head was against his breast, and his face was crushed in the soft masses of her golden hair. He came with her the rest of the way to the opposite shore, and then stood her on her feet again, standing back quickly so that she would not hear the pounding of his heart. Her face was radiantly beautiful, and she did not look at Walter but away from him as she said, "Thank you."¹²⁵

Because of Walter's gentlemanly nature, and his naiveté, things never go too far between the two children. However, their affection for one another grows throughout all the volumes of *The Realms*, usually retaining its romantic and gently innocent character. Darger needs his boy hero to experience longings he can't allow himself to feel, and, on the other hand, it is important that Starring not move into territory which might provoke anxiety or sexual feelings of a more aggressive nature. Whatever happens must be conceived of as an accident taking place between mere children. Even as a child, Starring needs to conceal from himself the real nature of his feelings.

Only the thoughts in his brain had made the happening in the creek anything but an accident he told himself. Gertrude had asked him to carry her across just as if she would have asked her uncle only. It was surprising to him that he had slipped in midstream and that his arms had

closed tighter about her, and that her hair had so strangely brushed his face. He remembered she had laughed when it seemed for a moment that they were going to fall into the stream together ... And yet, as he went on his heart was still thumping unsteadily, and in his arms and against his face remained still the sweet warm thrill of his contact with the unusual child ... As long as he lived, what happened in the creek would continue to be a reminder. He did not deny that crying voice inside of him.¹²⁶

If we look more closely at these revealing encounters, it becomes apparent that Darger's boy hero is being required to support emotions which could all too easily shift, not only into those of an adult, but a Glandelinian adult whose longings neither Darger, nor Walter, could possibly acknowledge as their own. It is quite possible that in some of these scenes, Darger borrowed from his readings in more secular, adult, even overtly sexual, literature, adapting material which he may not entirely have understood. Ultimately, however, his desires ran the risk of carrying him into bizarre territory, with thoughts, for example, which hint at the Glandelinian preoccupation with little girls' throats, and with strangulation as a sexual act. But Walter, no Glandelinian, represses all such yearnings, and it is little Gertrude Angeline herself who Darger portrays as vaguely seductive, and the stronger and more active of the two "friends."

Walter Starring Shows Confidence in Gertrude Angeline,

And She Shows Confidence in Him

As he looked at her closely, he observed a quick throb come and go in her white throat, and then a sudden impulsive movement that was always hers, she held out her hand to him. For a full moment he held it close, while her little fingers tightened about his own, and the warm thrill of them set his heart leaping with the thing he was almost desperately fighting down. She was even so near to him that he could feel the throb of her body. For an instant she bowed her head, and the sweet perfume of her hair came into his nostrils, the lusterous beauty of it much closer to his lips. Then gently she withdrew her hand, and stood back from him. To Walter she looked like a still younger girl, yet it was the almost loveliness of childhood of saintly parents that he observed in the flush of her face, and in the gladness that was flaming unashamed in her eyes ...

Gertrude looked at him suddenly, and in her face and eyes he saw that even now she was not excited. He did not think of her as a mere child just then. He did not think of her as Gertrude Angeline or a girlscout, or of her as Concenterinian Aronburg's niece. Indeed, the upward glance of her eyes was something that thrilled him greatly, to the very depths of his soul. She seemed for a moment to remind him of his own guardian angel in disguise. Her lips were trembling, but she smiled at him, and then she faced the river again,

and then she leaned a little forward, so that a warm breath of wind floated a shimmering tress of her hair against his cheek. He then leaned still nearer to her, he being a man of child worship, holding his breath, until his lips softly touched the back of her head. And then he stepped back, while a strange elated feeling came over him. At least his heart rose, and apparently choked him, and his fists clenched at his side. However, she apparently had not noticed what he had done, and now she seemed like a bird yearning to fly out the window, throbbing with the ardent desire to answer him in his questioning look, and then she was smiling up again into his face, hardened with the desperate struggle he was just then making with himself ...¹²⁷

Darger evidently struggled throughout his life with desires such as these, aware that he must not have such feelings for little girls. In these passages he seems more aware of his own sexual feelings than we might expect, while at the same time projecting them onto Starring. Starring's confusion is evident, as he uses religion, and the image of Gertrude as a guardian angel, in a barely successful attempt to restrain his raging desire.

"You resemble a guardian angel to me, when I should be yours, as a man should protect a child, and how come you protect me?" The words came from him numbly. He, of course, scarcely heard them or knew what he was saying, yet he was conscious of the strange and unnatural sound of his voice. He did not know whether he was

betraying himself beyond that. He did not see the deepening of the wild rose flush in the cheeks of general Aronburg's niece.¹²⁸

Darger as author, and Starring as his creation and alter ego, merge completely in these passages. Henry forgot himself at times, forgetting the distinction he tried to maintain between fiction and reality. He allows Walter to speak from the depths of his own adult anguish and confusion. Having identified himself as "a man of child worship," he is brought face to face with the erotic nature of that worship, that obsession. He struggles to deny it, and the intensity of that terrible struggle is palpable. In Walter it is always, more or less, under control, circumscribed and contained. But elsewhere, as we shall see, it will burst into flame and burn with uncontrollable fury.

And then she was gone. And for many minutes probably a full hour he did not move ... It seemed also that within him there was a crash than much greater than that of any physical thing. It might have been the truth breaking in upon him, surging over him like the waves of a stormy sea, breaking down the breakwater upon which he was seeking refuge, inundating him with a force, that was mightier than his own will. A voice in his soul was crying out the truth, that above all else in the world he wanted to reach out his arms to this glorious creature, who was his friend, and the niece of general Concentinian Aronburg, this young Angelinian girlscout of general Vivian's command ...

He knew it was not desire for a beautiful child, for even Violet and her sisters were far, far, far more beautiful than she was. It was the same feeling what he had even for them, because it was her character and her winning ways. It was the worship which general Aronburg himself must have for this young girl scout who was his niece. And the shock of it was like a great fire sweeping through him, leaving him dead and shriven, like the forest trees left standing in the wake of a fire he had been fleeing from. A breath that was almost a cry came from him, and his fists knotted until they were purple ...

He stared at the closed door, beginning to cry out against himself; and over him there swept slowly, and terribly another thing, the shame of his weakness, the hopelessness of the thing that for a time had eaten into him and consumed him.¹²⁹

Penrod

By far the most celebrated character adapted by Darger as alter ego was that of the boy hero Marco Schoefield Penrod. Penrod was independently famous well before Darger adopted him as a character in *The Realms*, since in a previous existence he had served as the hero of a series of children's books by the enormously successful American writer Booth Tarkington (1869–1946).¹³⁰ Darger must have read Tarkington's *Penrod* shortly after its publication in 1914, since its hero appeared soon after in volume three of *The Realms*. Although Henry was then in his early twenties, he responded to this children's story with intense interest verging on identification. Perhaps the little boy hero appealed to Darger because, like him, Penrod was attempting to become a writer of fiction. His nascent book was entitled *Harold Ramorez the Roadagent or Wild Life Among the Rocky Mountains*. They also have in common a father named Henry, and a sister, though Penrod's sister was older. Whatever the reason, Penrod entered the Realms of the Unreal, and immediately assumed a major role in the story, appearing regularly thereafter as one of the most important boy heroes, and an increasingly close friend of the Vivian girls.

Henry apparently felt no obligation to remain faithful to Tarkington's marvelous creation, borrowing little more than the name. Even that was changed, since Tarkington's boy hero was known as Penrod Schofield, while Darger's boy scout hero is called Marco Schoefield Penrod.¹³¹ Clearly, Darger intended his borrowing to be immediately recognizable but, by reversing the names, he indicated his desire to depart from the original. Since both characters are regularly referred to simply as "Penrod," the association with Booth Tarkington's character is at once established, but then denied.

Like Darger, Penrod is initially somewhat distant from the Vivian girls, a simple boy scout, somewhat awed by their beauty. But it soon becomes clear that Penrod's task is to enter into ever greater intimacy with them. While remaining ever young, indeed a mere boy, he finally enters adolescence with a vengeance, coming closer to normal sexual feelings than any other character in *The Realms*. It is in terms of this function that he most clearly serves as Darger's alter ego [5.3].

The other point of identification linking Darger and Penrod is the fact that Penrod is a foreigner — a Canadian. Henry seems to have been unusually aware of Canada, its English and French citizens, and the connection of the latter with the Catholic church. The source of his information is not known.¹³² Certainly, there is no indication that he ever visited Canada. Penrod, on the other hand, does claim to have been there, and the Glandelinians refer to him as that "black haired little Frenchie Imp, Schoefield Penrod."¹³³ However, later in *The Realms* the story undergoes an unexplained change, with Penrod now denying that he is foreign-born! This irrational shift may reflect a development

in Darger's perception of himself, as he began to realize that, unlike his father, he was not foreign-born but an American citizen.

... between courses the boyscout leader explained that he was not a Canadian as many thought he was, but that he was a native of Abbieannia, and had gone with his foster Father general Greatheart to Canada on touring trips before the great war broke out. When he returned to Abbieannia a little after the war came on, Violet and her sisters had him put into the troop of boyscouts, and now the little Princesses had made him Royal Boyscout leader of all boyscouts, placing him as high in rank as Angelinia Aronburg is over the girlscouts, and by hard study and constant practice, he had become the most famous of all child scouts in any country of the world.¹³⁴

This change in nationality is probably connected with Penrod's rapid rise to the top leadership of the boy scout regiments, but it was also necessitated by Darger's ultimate deposition of the question of Penrod's real origins. Although we now know that Penrod was adopted by General Greatheart, we still don't know who his real parents were, nor do we have any explanation of his very specific name, Marco Schoefield Penrod. Even the Vivian girls are mystified by Penrod's background.

5.3

Henry Darger

1 Place not mentioned. Penrod and his sisters are awfully hard on a double crossing coward. He ran away deserting them in time of danger. Collage drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper. 19 x 47 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



"... I nor my sisters never heard of so good a boy under any circumstances, even though you were foreign."

"Foreign?"

"Yes."

Penrod laughed good heartedly. "Were did you get that information?"

"Why Penrod dear," said Violet more happily now, "ain't you a foreigner? That at first was papa's main objection, because foreigners always turn out bad."

"You don't understand the situation," said Penrod. "General Greatheart took me from an orphanage asylum when I was little, and brought me over to the United States and Canada to see the sights. I learned English there, but I must admit I cannot read it. I can talk it only very badly ... Someone must have hoodwinked you when they told you I was a Canadian. I can speak French too but that don't mean I'm French. My father and mother who are dead were Abyssinkilians. I was born though in Pandora, Calverinia."¹³⁵

All of this material takes us very far away indeed from Booth Tarkington's Penrod, whose parentage is never in doubt, and who has not the slightest connection either with Canada, or with Calverinia. But, step by step, it brings us closer to Darger and his reality and wishes.

Adeledefob: Penrod in Disguise

Darger delights in disguise, and in the notion that people can "disappear" and then move about secretly, unrecognized by even their closest friends. All of the child heroes and heroines in the book appear from time to time in disguise, but one of the most successful in assuming a consistent alternate identity is Penrod when masquerading as the Glandelinian boy scout Adeledefob. Not only does he circulate freely in the Glandelinian camps, he even accompanies the Vivian girls on their adventures without their knowing it. Since Darger's readers share in the secret of Penrod's disguise, they obviously are intended to enjoy this delightful piece of mischief as much as he does. In high spirits, Henry carries this game of disguised identity as far as it can go, almost giving away the secret.

... somebody had taken up the subject of the most famous really of all boyscout spies, and that was the boy only known as Adeledefob ...

"What do you think of the boy?" smiled Penrod somewhat mischievously.

"We must tell the truth, though we don't want to hurt you Penrod dear," said Violet, "But he's a far better spy than even you are." ...

"It won't hurt me" declared Penrod emphatically, "and besides Princesses, I know him more than you do. He is far better than you had ever heard. I wish I could tell you who he is, but for the sake of his secret work just now I cannot reveal his identity, but I'm truthful Violet, when I say he has often been your best companion, and accompanied you on many a

mission and brought you and your sisters and even Evans through dangerous adventures softly and you knew him not ... Every general and boy or girls scout is very proud [of him], and say too like you do, that they don't want to hurt me in saying it, but that in comparing to him, I don't even amount to much, but I have always laughed and said some day when they learn his identity, they'll get the most shocking surprise of their life ..."

"Even though he is better than you in his work, we have loved you most. But sometimes," and she looked at him curiously, "I wish you were him."¹³⁶

Behind all of the multiple disguises Darger himself is always to be found. In loving Adeledefob or Penrod, the Vivian sisters, without knowing it, also love their ultimate protector and guardian, their creator Henry Darger; and it was perhaps this final secret that he relished the most. But to love them in return he needed his boy scout heroes. And since they too tended to be somewhat inhibited, he used disguise or accident to allow them to slip, even in the midst of battle, into romantic or sexual experiences.

Adeledefob's arm tightened about the figure of the little girl. It was an unconscious gesture of the protective instinct of the male. "Do not be afraid, Violet," he said ...

Holding to the stump, Adeledefob's lips were close to Violet's ear as he sought to make himself heard above the battle's roar. As a sea of troops struck the staggering Glandelinian front, a shell exploded close to the little party, and its concussion

threw Adeledefob forward so that his cheek touched the cheek of the little girl, and as she turned her head his lips brushed hers. Each realized it was an accident, but did not regret it, though the effect was none the less surprising. Adeledefob also felt the little girl's body against his, and consciousness of contact must have been reflected in his eyes, as if he had been in contact with some little celestial being come down from heaven to watch the battle. Adeledefob saw excitement in her eyes, but it gave him no pleasure. He imagined the treatment he and the little girls would receive if captured by the enemy.¹³⁷

Only toward the end of *The Realms*, in the context of a number of extraordinary revelations, does Penrod disclose his intimate association with the powerful spy Adeledefob.

"Though no one knew it, I was a boyscout officer even before this dreadful war broke out, but I was in the enemy lines all the time, spying, sneaking child slaves to freedom, and doing everything else ... In fact, I must confess to you all ... I'm the original 'Adeledefob.'" Violet and her sisters gasped at this announcement, and Violet sat down suddenly in amazement.

"Surely you don't mean you are the famous boyscout called 'Adeledefob' by nickname?" asked Joice in astonishment ...

"I have in the enemy's lines always assumed that name. They have never even discovered the deception yet."

"But, but —"

"But what's so strange about that?" asked Penrod, amazed himself at their astonishment. "Surely it was nothing for me to assume a false name to deceive the enemy?"¹³⁸

The Rattlesnake Boy

Another dangerous character is one called "The Rattlesnake." That personage goes under the name of James Radcliffe, but we suspects there [is] more girl than boy in that one main dangerous scoundrel.

—Authorities of the
Glandelinian Government¹³⁹

Although it might be thought that Adeledefob could represent Penrod's shadow self, the two characters are too similar for this to be the case. That role is played in the story by a separate and distinct character, Penrod's best friend and companion in adventure, James Radcliffe, the Rattlesnake Boy. He represents perhaps the most unexpected of Darger's other selves and, unquestionably, the most astonishing of the disguised figures who haunt *The Realms*. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of his disguise is that Penrod is completely unaware of the true identity and nature of his companion, despite the fact that they travel together as a pair throughout the story.¹⁴⁰

For many volumes everyone, including the reader, is kept totally in the dark about Radcliffe. We follow the two chums from adventure to adventure, aware of their loyalty to each other, trusting in their ability

to rescue one another from situations of danger. Radcliffe is simply another boy hero, respected and feared by all.

Like all the other well known boyscouts in the christian lines he was always successful in his missions ... And he could wrestle successfully with any boyscout, lick any in a boxing match, and out do them in anything ... The fiercest of the enemy being afraid of him, as if he were a spook, caused the Vivian Girls, after they became acquainted with him, to choose him especially, because Penrod, being his constant comrade and dearest friend, needed his help, because he struck Violet and her sisters as being sincere and serious in everything, doing what he said he would, and throughoutly honest.¹⁴¹

The discovery that the Rattlesnake Boy is, in fact, a girl comes as quite a surprise, despite a number of hints previously provided by Darger. "At least there was something queer about Radcliffe, and what had been said concerning him."¹⁴² General Concentinian Aronburg finally reveals the well-kept secret:

"My darling niece ... has a missing and lost sister."

"Lost sister?"

"Yes, but for my sake and hers don't tell a soul what I'm going to tell you. That boy Radcliffe who goes about with Penrod is her in disguise ... It is the truth" said general Aronburg, "Annie Aronburg, disguised as that boy is also my niece."¹⁴³

At a later stage in our investigation (chapter 10), we will explore the remarkable changes and confusion of gender so typical of *The Realms*. For the present it is sufficient to indicate that one of the split-off selves embodied by Darger in these remarkable alter ego figures is female, yet capable of functioning in every sense as a fully competent male.¹⁴⁴ Given the fact that all the girls in *The Realms* possess male genitals, how is anyone to know? Penrod's confusion is perhaps understandable. More complex and difficult to explain is Darger's internal situation, and the extraordinary ease with which he manipulates sexual identity. A missing little girl lurked deep within his soul: From childhood on the core of his identity had been formed around this foreign body which happened to be female. Its presence is reflected in the terrible longing, the desperate and ambivalent need he felt for little girls. That, at times explicitly sexual, need is most clearly embodied in the person of his boy hero Penrod. At a certain, highly significant, moment in the story it can no longer be contained.

Penrod's Loneliness

There is a certain darkness into which the soul of the young man sometimes descends — a horror of desolation, abandonment and realized worthlessness, which is one of the most real of hells in which we are compelled to walk.

—Kipling¹⁴⁵

Darger's need to pour his deepest feelings into these fictional boys, his alter egos, is so strong that, at times, fiction falls away, and the real Henry is revealed with painful clarity. The disguise doesn't always work, and the author is exposed. This is particularly true of Penrod, who bears within himself much of the pain and turmoil of Darger's early years. In a disturbing chapter entitled "Penrod's Loneliness" we catch a glimpse of a Henry Darger we have never seen, a deeply tormented and depressed man, whose life, but for his visions of the Vivian girls, is seemingly without love or hope.¹⁴⁶

The scene is set in a Glandelinian base hospital where Penrod (disguised as Adeledefob), having been shot by Gerald Starring, is recovering from his wounds.¹⁴⁷ In that Darger spent much of his waking life working in hospitals, this setting, and the dark mood associated with it, might seem particularly suitable for a chapter the main purpose of which seems to be to portray the depth of Penrod's despair. Yet Darger's characterization of hospital life, apart from one unhappy patient, is surprisingly objective, and not lacking in sympathy for his fellow workers.

Among these hospital employees, all military ones, there seemed to be a genial kindly influence at work, despite the fact

that they were Glandelinians (or maybe they're only kind among themselves), a certain homeliness too, which must needs assert itself where many are working together, working side by side. One was the window washer, yet all made a harmony, the man who was polishing up the waxed floor of the ward, shining the brass fixtures of the beds, and those dusting and mopping and scrubbing. It was a busy scene of which, however, the boy paid as much "attention to" as if it was not going on.¹⁴⁸

Since Darger himself did many of these jobs in the hospitals in which he worked, we can imagine that he is present on the ward. Given the content of this chapter it might almost seem that his idealized portrayal of his fellow workers is intended to suggest that they all function together as a happy family. Meanwhile, Darger's attention is focused elsewhere.

There was one wounded boy scout of very dignified appearance who had not stirred from his bed, but he had finished his dinner, had put down his bowl of soup, and had taken from under his pillow a small book which was, like its owner, clean and beautiful in appearance. It was however a small album, and for some reason he seemed to have an unusual great yet sad pleasure in looking at it, for he turned over only seven of its pages with all the tenderness characteristic of one who loves what he looks at in such an ordinary little book. His picture was in it but that he gave not even the most trifling glance.¹⁴⁹

Penrod's obsessional involvement with pictures in a book, obviously portraits of the seven Vivian sisters, serves to let us know that Darger is surfacing from beneath the layers of disguise. The portrait of Penrod we are about to examine is unusual in allowing us to see not only the surface (his behavior) but, on this occasion, more deeply into his heart. For reasons we need not explore, he has abandoned any attempt to disguise his real feelings. The charming and playful boy hero has disappeared, replaced by a hostile and angry young man, who we may come to recognize as Henry Darger — age uncertain.

... he seemed to become unconscious of his surroundings, as much, if not more, unconscious than anyone of everybody around him. He was somewhat sullen, and indeed anyone might have been justified in mistaking him for the portrait of a boy in bed, but that only his lips moved, for it was his custom to read things softly to himself ... The patients ... knew from experience he never noticed them, and that all greetings were not only wasted on him, but that he only sneered or scowled in answer, and all words were wanton expenditure on him.¹⁵⁰

The wall of silence and indifference Penrod has erected around himself would have been familiar to Darger, since it also served as his defense, and not infrequently was the face he presented to the world. In this state of withdrawal, pictures in an album have apparently come to mean more than outer reality to Penrod. Far from mere pictures, they symbolize a vast fantasy world contained

within himself, a world to which images give access. He lives now only for these children of his dreams; they are all he believes in, all he loves. In all this we easily recognize Darger.

BUT NOW, for a moment, the story resumes, as a little nine-year-old girl, a Glandelinian scout called Jane Mellfort, manages to intrude on Penrod's silence.¹⁵¹ She grasps something of his isolation, and seeks to draw near and to understand.

"Master Adeledefob, you have forgotten your dinner again. Do you know I begin to hate that book of yours. It always makes you forget your food." ...

"Ah" he answered, "You must not hate this album. I have had more pleasant hours with it than with any living person ... Mercifully we have in us the power of forgetting. But I can't forget those I have in the little book ...

"I don't care about talking any more now," he said suddenly, and instead of continuing his dinner, he went to work, silently looking at certain pictures in the album, and Jane Mellfort glanced at him and thought she had never seen the boy look so forlorn and desolate as he did today. He looked as if no gentle hand had ever been placed on him in kindness and affection, and that was to her a terrible thing for she was one of those strangely minded little persons who persist in believing that affection is as needful to human life as the gracious rain to any plant life.¹⁵²

In these pages it is apparent that, as Darger writes, he is regressing, becoming himself nine years old, becoming again the child he once was. Perhaps the imaginary visit with this affectionate little girl, who might have been his sister, has stirred him more deeply than he realizes. As a result, Penrod fades out as, for a moment, Darger allows himself to feel sorry for the little boy he once was. Through the thoughts of the little girl, he begins to remember the past, all he has lost, all he never had.

"I should like to go back and get my album once more. I feel as if I must continue looking at them a little while longer. They have been my companions since last night, and they are part of myself, those pictures. I can close my eyes and recall them faithfully. But I want to take a look at them occasionally. When I look at them I think of their life, and can only wonder at their bravery and good deeds. It was so strange and cruel that they should be taken from me, but I, 'Adeledefob,' will revenge it," and he said the last words bitterly indeed.¹⁵³

Penrod is, of course, thinking of the Vivian sisters. But in the words, "It was so strange and cruel that they should be taken from me," it seems possible that Henry is remembering a time before the Vivian girls existed, and a loss more terrible than anything he could bring himself to write of.

He put his hands to his eyes, but he could not keep back the tears. "Long before I knew them, I have been such a lonely little boy," he sobbed. "No one but I can tell what a lonely loveless life mine has been before I was rescued from my enemies and brought back to my own." ...

He sobbed for many minutes, and she did not know what to say to him to comfort him ... but nevertheless, she took his hand within her own and gently caressed it, as one might do to a little child in pain.

He looked up and tried to smile through his tears ... Last night when this terrible pain of sorrow and loneliness came over me, I wished you or the Vivian Girls were near me, I wished to hear their voices. There is very beautiful music in their voices, their voices are prettier than those of the prettiest singing birds. I had wished you were near me too."

"I would have come to you gladly," she said, smiling quietly at him.¹⁵⁴

In Penrod's anguish we sense something of the traumatic reality of the childhood experiences underlying Darger's creation, the terrible need and pain which forced the Realms of the Unreal into existence. The Vivian girls, conceived in sorrow and loneliness, were there for him night after night when he was overwhelmed by the terrible pain. Created out of desperation and despair these lovely little beings would accompany him throughout his life. They will be his only source of affection and love. Darger knows this.

"... it has been a great comfort to me to sit and watch the Vivian Girl Princesses ... Their graceful ways, their unusual manners, their beauty and strangeness, have helped me to understand the mystery in little girls which all the books about them cannot make clear, though we may bend over them year after year, and grow old over them, old in age and old in spirit. They did love me and I love them."¹⁵⁵

Darger, as an adult, clearly understood far more than we imagine of the forces operating within him. In contemplating "Penrod's Loneliness" he allows us access to his own. We must remember, however, that these words were written in the silence of his room in Chicago, and that he was alone. There was no one to hear his confession, no one to respond. Only through an act of imagination could he summon a listener, a little girl who might hear and understand. Only in the Realms of the Unreal was love imaginable, only in a world of fiction could one risk remembering.

"What good is real affection and love if you cannot retain those you love? Greater natures than mine are better able to bear these sort of troubles, and yet didn't, and I did, though my heart contracted and withered up almost."

He paused for a moment, many recollections overpowering him ... He seemed to have unlocked the casket of his heart, closed for so many hours, as if all the memories of the past and all the secrets of his heart and life were rushing out, glad to be free once more and grateful for the open air of sympathy.¹⁵⁶

Brothers and Sisters: Sexuality in *The Realms*

A surprising number of characters in the Realms are orphans. Penrod and Jack Evans are only the most prominent examples among many. Not surprisingly, Adeledefob is also said to be an orphan since his mother is dead.

"How old is his mother?" asked Daisy.

"He's an orphan," said Penrod.

"He doesn't like anyone to speak of her because he says it brings back to him sad memories."¹⁵⁷

By the time Darger was writing *The Realms*, he was an orphan in the fullest sense. But this passage may imply that from the age of four, when he lost his mother, he may already have felt himself to be an orphan. An inability to speak of his mother is certainly evident in all of his writings; indeed, in his case, the sad memories had largely disappeared due to massive repression.

Given the unusual number of orphans, the act of adoption and the assumption of the role of guardian are not infrequent events in the story. They appear as a natural means of expressing affection, both between children, and between children and adults. The Vivian sisters acquire a number of additional siblings in this way, arranging for their Imperial parents to adopt Angelinia Aronburg (who is not an orphan), and Penrod (who is).¹⁵⁸

"When we at first asked papa to let us have you for a brother, we had a hard time getting his consent. We love everyone, and when we can be sure we can trust them, we let anyone embrace us to their hearts content. But papa wants boys who have good mettle and bravery, and loves us like,

a brother, before he would give this consent. But we were able to prove you were worthy of us, and so he consented ... We have nevertheless been so happy that papa gave us the consent to have you as our brother because our hearts came out to you, oh so much ..."¹⁵⁹

We know that Darger desired to adopt a little girl, and at several points in *The Realms* he claims to have done so. But, paradoxically, his deeper desire seems to have been a wish that he might be adopted by little girls. He was able to arrange for this to happen to several of his alter ego figures, but not for himself. In this slightly unusual version of the "family romance," adoption into the Vivian family would supply not only seven sisters, but loving and aristocratic parents, along with wealth, power, and fame.¹⁶⁰

Once Penrod is adopted by the Vivian family, he refers regularly to the Vivian girls as his sisters, and his behavior toward them changes. It appears that for Darger adoption represented an unusually intense form of intimacy, which promised the removal of physical barriers and of sexual inhibitions, providing a kind of bodily closeness which, paradoxically, he considered acceptable only between brothers and sisters.

"What a good loving brother," exclaimed Daisy.

"And he sure does love us too and loves to hold me so, oh so long, in his arms, don't you Penrod?" said Violet.

"When I have one of you in my arms," said Penrod demurely, "It is like being in a children's heaven."

"No wonder we love you so." said Daisy...

"Penrod placed his arm around little Daisy, who was sitting closest, and said slightly teasingly, "Won't you be my beautiful dear little Daisy?"

"Why Penrod dear, you know I'm everything to you like my dear sisters are."

"You and your sisters remind me of beautiful roses. You are more beautiful than a daisy, and oh so innocent and pure."

Despite the fact that Penrod and his adopted sisters are all described as pre-adolescent children, and do not age, we are forced to realize that their feelings and gestures of affection toward each other extend well beyond anything considered normal for brothers and sisters. Penrod's attraction to his adopted sisters is unmistakably erotic.

Penrod watched her lovingly a little later as she and her sisters pored over maps spread out on the table ... while Violet pointed out to him and her sisters and Jennie routes their father might have followed. As he listened to her silvery voice, he was admiring again the perfection of the profile of her and her sisters, the creamy smoothness of her and her sisters' skin, and watching fascinated the gentle rise and fall of her bosom beneath her purple silken uniform jumper. The touch of her golden hair on his cheeks as he bent his head close to hers, ostensibly to study the maps, set his pulse throbbing, and he had to curb the wild desire to hug her in his arms then and there, and smother her with kisses. But he understood this was no time for that now, they must hurry, even though she would have

lovingly returned his embrace. No lover ever loved his sweetheart as Penrod loved his beautiful sisters, and a holy love it was too. His primitive instinct was stirred.¹⁶¹

Just how primitive his desires could become is seen in a similar love scene, which is interrupted just in time by a horde of Glandelinians.

Penrod was just then hugging Jennie in the flame of his holy passion for her, when she suddenly screamed, "Penrod, for God's sake let me go. I hear something awfully strange outside." He had forced her head back, and was kissing her on the mouth and neck as she screamed this.¹⁶²

The assault "by a pack of furious Glandelinians" is easily recognized in psychological terms, as a shift occurring in Darger's psyche, into instincts so primitive that Penrod is instantly replaced by the violent and sadistic sexuality of the Glandelinians. The trigger for such a shift is Penrod's encounter with the little girl's neck.

Between brothers and sisters, any amount of hugging and kissing is acceptable. At times Penrod makes love to them in groups, holding two or three in his arms at a time. Only occasionally does he display a preference for one or another of the Vivian sisters, most commonly Jennie, who is described as the prettiest of the little princesses. It is very clear that Darger assumed little girls would respond with excitement to such treatment, even initiating it on occasion.

Jennie had placed herself in front of him without even blinking, and looked steadily into his sullen face.

Suddenly, he said, struggling hard to appear calm, "What is the matter Jennie dear?" Then he grabbed Jennie and hugged

her in a way that he would have been bashful to do, if he had seen general Hanson.

He was standing on the very threshold, and just about to enter the room, when Jennie replied, "Thou must love me, Penrod." Surprised, the general stood still and folded his arms.

"Well, I never ..." he said half aloud. Actually Penrod and Jennie have fallen in love with one another. "I hope this lasts for good."

Penrod let go, and blushed, while Jennie smiled happily.¹⁶³

Penrod's bashfulness and temporary inhibition is recognizable as a projection of Darger's own feelings. As we know, he too responded to the Vivian girls with desire and uncertainty. "He had longed to fold them in his strong arms, but this he did not exactly have the nerve to do, and he felt the desire almost irresistibly."¹⁶⁴ It is Penrod's task to go beyond such internal restraints, but, at least at times, he is hindered by Christian morality, at least when what is involved is more than hugs and kisses. "At night, Penrod slept in a separate tent, for it would not be polite for boys to sleep with girls, though in Angelinia that is usually done more than ever in this country."¹⁶⁵ What seems to stand in Penrod's way is, strangely, his status in the Vivian family. As an adopted, rather than a blood brother, he continues to feel certain moral inhibitions. It is the removal of this final barrier that leads to the full expression of his sexuality.

IN VOLUME TEN, part one, of *The Realms*, Penrod, an orphan boy, discovers the identity of his real parents.

"That is quite a history," said Emperor Vivian. "But there is a little more history about our Fair Land of Abbieannia and her States, that you do not seem to understand — perhaps for the reason that no one ever told it to you.

"Many years before you came to be born here, this land was then united under one Ruler, though it is now under two, myself and my brother, and strange as it may seem, the Ruler's name was almost Vivian at the end. My far distant Generated Relative happened to have been a woman, and her name was Jane Penrod Vivian.

"My brother, Hanson, looked up His and My Generaltion in his great book which the Government supplies to you, or to me rather; and I have been able to find out that the people who you say were your father and mother only adopted you.

"I can prove, therefore, that you are originally the real brothers of my fair daughters, for you are my lost son who had been stolen away from me when you were a little baby ... I was wise in adopting you as their brother, before I and Hanson discovered the real fact ..."

"I am very glad of that," said Penrod. "and I hope you will consider me one of your most faithful sons ..."

"So, as you are now discovered as our little lost stolen son, I offer you our own palace, the full command of the situation as the Princesses, the same authority and

dignified rank, and also you shall be the official Prince of my whole Kingdom, to take the place of my wicked Traitor son, Germania, and to be treated with every respect and consideration, and do with my little daughters as you like in all things — that show your love ..."

"I accept your kind generous offer with gratitude, Gracious Mother and Father," the good brave boy said in a soft voice, and they could all see that tear drops were standing in his keen blue eyes. It meant a good deal to him to discover that he was really their brother, and that he could secure such good company for good as the dearest and loveliest little girls he had ever set eyes on. And they were really his sisters. How he now held little Jennie and then the others close to his throbbing heart.¹⁶⁶

For Henry, it seems that adoption is the only means of obtaining permanent possession of a loved one. This makes some sense when that loved one is invariably a little girl. Marriage is never mentioned as a realistic prospect for any of his alter ego figures, or for himself. To go beyond adoption, and to discover a true blood relationship, implies a form of closeness surpassing all human bonds. For Darger, of course, it would have represented the discovery of his lost sister. This dream, unreal and yet within the realm of the possible, underlays all of the romantic and sexual fantasy in *The Realms*. Darger seems to have known nothing of incest. Only the rediscovery of a lost sister could remove all the obstacles to love. This is precisely Penrod's situation, once he has learned that he is the true born brother of the Vivian sisters.

The Song of Solomon

*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine!*¹⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the most passionate love scene in *The Realms* takes place in Glandelinian rather than Christian territory. The Vivian girls and their brother Prince Penrod, in disguise, are entertained by the enemy in an environment of dazzling luxury.

Beautiful child slaves in diaphanous garments handed round trays of sweetmeats, fruits, and small flagons of wine. Musicians played great bands, and at intervals the guests rose in turn to lay tribute at the feet of Violet and her sisters. Some preferred ornaments of gold, other precious stones ... They had difficulty to imagine that the whole affair was not some fantastic dream.¹⁴⁸

Darger perversely introduces biblical references into this Glandelinian idyl, weaving with consummate skill a confusing mixture of good and evil in order to evoke the experience of "holy love." Without realizing it, the children yield to the seductive situation, abandoning, unaware, the morality of the Catholic church for the sensuous and irrational Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament. Ultimately, it is Penrod himself who holds out the promise of untasted pleasures.

"What we have witnessed have cast a gloom and dread upon you my dear sisters, which I must try to dispel," he said smilingly ... Presently, I shall hope to conjure the smile back again to your darling faces,

and the light on the return to your beautiful blue eyes, and we shall taste happiness such as even the saints on earth probably never had. This shall be a night of joy and rejoicing and delight, in spite of the Glandelinians."

It seems that Darger is quite consciously setting the scene for an event of unusual significance. A more adult eroticism is taking over, with imagery, language, and desires deriving neither from the natural impulses of the children, nor from Darger. This is sexuality dressed up in the fantasies of Hollywood, awash in gaudy opulence and clichés. Had Henry perhaps seen a biblical epic of the kind which once served as a vehicle for the unleashing of sexual passion? Was he borrowing in part from romantic novels of the kind written by women for women? Whatever his various sources, including the Old Testament, may have been, he was about to unleash them upon unsuspecting, but willing, children. That they are both innocent and willing he had to believe.

The child slaves who had attended Violet and her sisters earlier in the day were awaiting them in a richly decorated apartment furnished with elaborately carved bedsteads and chairs of strange shape and design. There were skins and woven mats of rich colouring and texture on the floor, and the doorway was curtained heavily by hangings beautifully embroidered in gold. The room was dimly lighted by three wax candles, and a tiny spiral of reddish colored smoke rose from an incense burner in the center of the room perfuming the air.

Penrod departed abruptly after wishing Violet and her sisters goodnight ... She and her sisters doffed their feathered headdress of a hat, and their ceremonial uniforms, and submitted themselves to the attentions of the child slaves, who bathed their feet, massaged their white limbs, brushed their golden hair, and sprayed them with fragrant perfume. The nightgowns they had in readiness was surprisingly in the form of a children's nightie, being of white cloth material, sleeveless, cut low at the neck, and beautifully embroidered ...

Left alone, Violet and her sisters, except Jennie, laid on the beds, but Jennie seated herself on the side of her own bed to think over all that had happened.

The situation Darger is constructing, step by step, is unusually contrived with details dropped neatly into place. There is no feeling here that Darger is walking in his sleep, or that he is unaware of what he is about to cause to happen. He seems to have made a conscious decision, after having written ten huge volumes, to allow his children to experience feelings, bodily sensations, forms of closeness, which he himself would never know.

For the first time he seems aware that seven little girls together represent something of an impediment to love making, and so Jennie, Penrod's favorite, is chosen, or chooses herself, to be the sacrificial victim. The fantasy that follows is pure theater: The candles are lit, child actors in place (Darger presumably is in the wings), all is in readiness.

A sudden rustle of the heavy hangings curtaining the doorway of the bed chamber made her turn her head suddenly, and the next moment she started to her feet with an involuntary exclamation — for she saw that it was Penrod who had swept aside the curtains and entered.

She got scared, so her heart beat very loudly, believing something was decidedly wrong, and she demanded breathlessly, "What's wrong, Penrod dear?" and instinctively snatched up one of the cloth coverings of the bed to throw it around her shoulders, believing Glandelinians would enter with him.

"Nothing wrong," he answered.

"What do you want then, Penrod dear?"

"What should I want, but you and your beloved sisters?" answered Penrod in a low voice. "I had no chance yet to even kiss you and they good night." He had divested himself of his highest commission uniform, and wore only a single brown garment in the form of a sort of toga which made him appear more as if he was a little Greek God. But he had his pistols and his cartridge belt on for any emergency. His blue eyes were gleaming as if they were blue jewels, seeming moreover to vary in colour as if they were jewels of changing lights, his lips were parted in a smile, and his cheeks were flushed.

Jennie had never noticed till now the real beauty of his face and form, and his words had caused her heart to contract, and a thrill, yet joyful and safe feeling. If he was not her guarding angel in disguise, then what was he? ...

Penrod laughed softly, and came swiftly toward her with hands outstretched. "Would you rebuke me for doing what you commanded me to do, my dearest sis?" he retorted in his soft musical voice. "Now there are no foes around to hear or see, and I sure do long for thee in my arms." ...

Penrod sat by the bed, encircling her slim supple body, drawing her close. He was strong, stronger than even Gerald Starring ... and had she been in the hands of an enemy boy scout this strong, she would have been powerless to resist him, but she felt happy in his embrace.

"Will our Dear Blessed Lord, who sent thee and thy sisters to me, love me more for accepting this holy gift with gladness and love in return," he exclaimed breathlessly, his arms tightening around poor happy Jennie. "Thou art the bravest and fairest of my dearest sisters, my beloved little sister, behold thou art fair and have the nature of the angels in thee, and thou, and they your beautiful sisters, have ravished my heart with holy love. Thy lips are as a thread of holy scarlet and thy speech is that of the angels. Thy neck is as a pillar of ivory, thy head as the most finest gold, and thy breath is as myrrh and frankincense. Oh, my beloved little sister mine, thou art mine and I am thine for thou art she for whom my soul loveth next to God, and for whom my body has been athirst, and yet, why do we have to go through all this?"

His words were snatches of the "Song of Solomon" perverted to holy uses, and Jennie recognized this subconsciously as she almost fell asleep in his arms. Seeing she was falling asleep, he gave her kisses, burning holy, passionate kisses, which seemed to cause her to doze off the more. Penrod himself was laboring for breath when at last he desisted for a time, and Jennie almost swooning with happiness, and her senses reeling into a sort of happy dream, lay panting and happy in his arms, her heart fluttering like that of a bird held captive in the hand, her white bosom heaving tumultuously, her every nerve quivering with happiness as that of a celestial child, for the happy spell came on her again, and Penrod had produced it.

"Your love and mine too, Dearest sister, is far better than wine to the even ones, and your little lips intoxicate me and fire me with the desire that we and your dearest sisters were in Heaven with God where we belong my beloved little sisters, and if they were not asleep, I would make them as happy as you" resumed Penrod with a beautiful smile, and began to embrace her again with redoubled fervor. Jennie however was asleep as he lifted her in his arms as if she were only a child's doll, kissed her little white throat, her breast, and shoulders, and fondled her. She was so asleep as to be like one drugged or hypnotized, when at length Penrod let her down, and then there came a beautiful happy smile on her face.

Penrod's arms were still about her some hours later when at length Jennie came to her self, as if awakening from a happy Heaven made trance, and they tightened instinctively as she, forgetting where she was, stirred and attempted to rise. At first Jennie could not remember, could not realize what had happened, and why she was so happy. She still felt the happy spell, and she was dazed, and her brain seemed to be in a whirl.

"Jennie dear, why not go to sleep," murmured Penrod drowsily. The mists began to clear from her brain, and realization of where she was, and what had happened, gradually dawned upon her, and she lay for a time silent and petrified by happiness and contentment. Then she fell asleep again, and he left her to herself after imprinting a kiss on the foreheads of her sisters.¹⁶⁹

Nothing about this scene implies any real familiarity on Darger's part with actual love making; quite the contrary. It is pure sexual fantasy assembled from a variety of popular sources. The only thing we can be quite sure of is that he was familiar with the experience of orgasm, and has tried to portray Jennie's first experience of the "happy spell."¹⁷⁰ His depiction of sex is that of a writer seeking to avoid overt anatomical detail; but given the identical nature of the genital equipment of the little boy and girl, it is difficult to know how much

further he might actually have gone in terms of sexual physiology. Penrod is stimulated by Jennie's passivity, his excitement grows as she slips deeper and deeper into a passive state resembling sleep. Yet it is evident that, awake or asleep, it is she who enjoys the most intense sensations, despite the active role assumed by Penrod.

Penrod has served his purpose as Darger's alter ego to the fullest extent, permitting Darger to experience vicariously all that he was capable of imagining. Despite the lack of detail, it is clear that Darger intended this scene to represent the fullest expression of normal sexual activity between a boy and girl. Although it is enacted by a brother and sister, it is intended to encompass everything that would take place between man and wife. This was the love that Darger sought, the only holy sexual love he could imagine. That it might offend, indeed horrify, others, he does not appear to know. At the very least he found the courage to imagine such passionate experiences occurring in the Realms of the Unreal, and dared, in the absence of an audience, at long last to write of them.

Penrod's Death

Penrod is the only child hero of importance in *The Realms* to fall in battle. The manner of his death, and its effect on his family and friends, will be discussed later (see p. 634). However, the fact that he, among all of Darger's alter ego representatives, dies is so unexpected, indeed shocking, that we cannot avoid confronting the question inevitably posed by the death of a child — why? Why did Darger choose to kill off Penrod?

Another brother of the Vivian girls meets death on the battlefield, the traitorous and evil Germania Vivian. But his death is deserved, occurring as one in a series of Glandelinian deaths which form part of the conclusion of *The Realms*. However, no Christian child, with whom the reader has become deeply involved, either ages or dies. Darger is at pains to reassure his readers that the children they have come to love will survive, even after his book has come to an end.

But to give the reader ease of mind, I would say never worry about them. Violet and her sisters seen the end of the war and the glorious effects of the victory and Heaven knows how long they lived after that.¹⁷¹

The shock of Penrod's death in the final volume of *The Realms* is truly overwhelming, so totally unexpected and so sudden, that the reader immediately assumes that Darger is up to one of his tricks, and that Penrod will reappear in a matter of pages, along with the kind of contrived explanation we are used to. Surely we have been set up? But, in fact, Penrod does not reappear, his life in the Realms of the Unreal has come to an abrupt, blunt, violent end.

Darger, while manifestly embracing irrationality, is not illogical. Almost every event in *The Realms* is carefully prepared for, sometimes long before its occurrence. It is worth considering whether there are any prior indications of the fate awaiting this boy. Death in *The Realms* often comes as a punishment, usually long delayed. Penrod, as we know, has transgressed a number of societal and moral laws, engaging in sexual activity with a child, incest, and possibly sacrilege. Each of these transgressions, clearly forbidden by his church, is passed over by Darger without comment. By contrast, the sexual and sadistic activities of the Glandelinians come in for endless condemnation and eventual retribution. It is precisely Darger's failure to take note of Penrod's sins that causes his death to come as a surprise.

Although Penrod is revealed as a blood brother of the Vivian princesses, and a prince in his own right, it is never for a moment suggested that he belongs to the mysterious category of celestial child. He is aware throughout the story that the Vivian girls are somehow sacred, loved, and protected by God. His assumptions concerning their privileged status undergo considerable change as the story develops. As he becomes more intimate with them, his speculations about their relations with the Divine begin to move in strange, unmistakably heretical directions.

"Do you really believe we are possessed by angels?" asked Jennie as he clasped her hand. "We seem always to get compliments, and are kissed and caressed when we feel sure we do not deserve it. You regard me and my sisters more as seven little heavenly angels than mere humans. Sometimes you are even a little afraid of us."

"But among little girls you are the best friends of God, and I'll bet in secret, when you are asleep and never conscious of it, that you may have been kissed and caressed by God and His Blessed Mother also." retorted Penrod smilingly. "You have strange happy spells sometimes, and that is why I believe it." ...

Jennie found herself at a loss for a reply.¹⁷²

A plausible explanation for Penrod's death is that he has been trespassing on sacred ground. Allowed to defy human laws with impudence, and to engage in all that was forbidden to Darger his creator, his fate is sealed when he, alone of all the Christian heroes, enters into overtly sexual relations with the celestial children.¹⁷³

The passionate avowal that burst from the good boyscout silenced and frightened her a little, and to her hot consternation, he caught her to an embrace of steel as he had done to her sisters, and many other girlscoouts so dear to him ...

"I reckon I'm plum crazy, but there is something in you and your sisters that is irresistible, even when you were so disguised and I didn't know you and they were so beautiful. And yet it's all a lifetime in a day — love and death within an hour. I know you and your sisters love me, and I loved you and they better than a lover ..."

Their lips clung a moment, then when she was free she covered her face with trembling hands. She wept softly, because she loved him as well as her sisters did, and knew it, and was deathly afraid for him in that darkly devious maze to which she knew he was addressed. She dared

not tell him so, she dared not even warn him as it would do no good.

Violet and her sisters, with Penrod's kisses warm upon their lips, and still fancying of feeling his embraces, looked after him with an ache in their hearts as he rode away.¹⁷⁴

Darger's Double: Jack Evans

"Ain't those little girls mine to protect, body and soul? Can't I do what I like, and make them all happy when it is my duty to do so?"

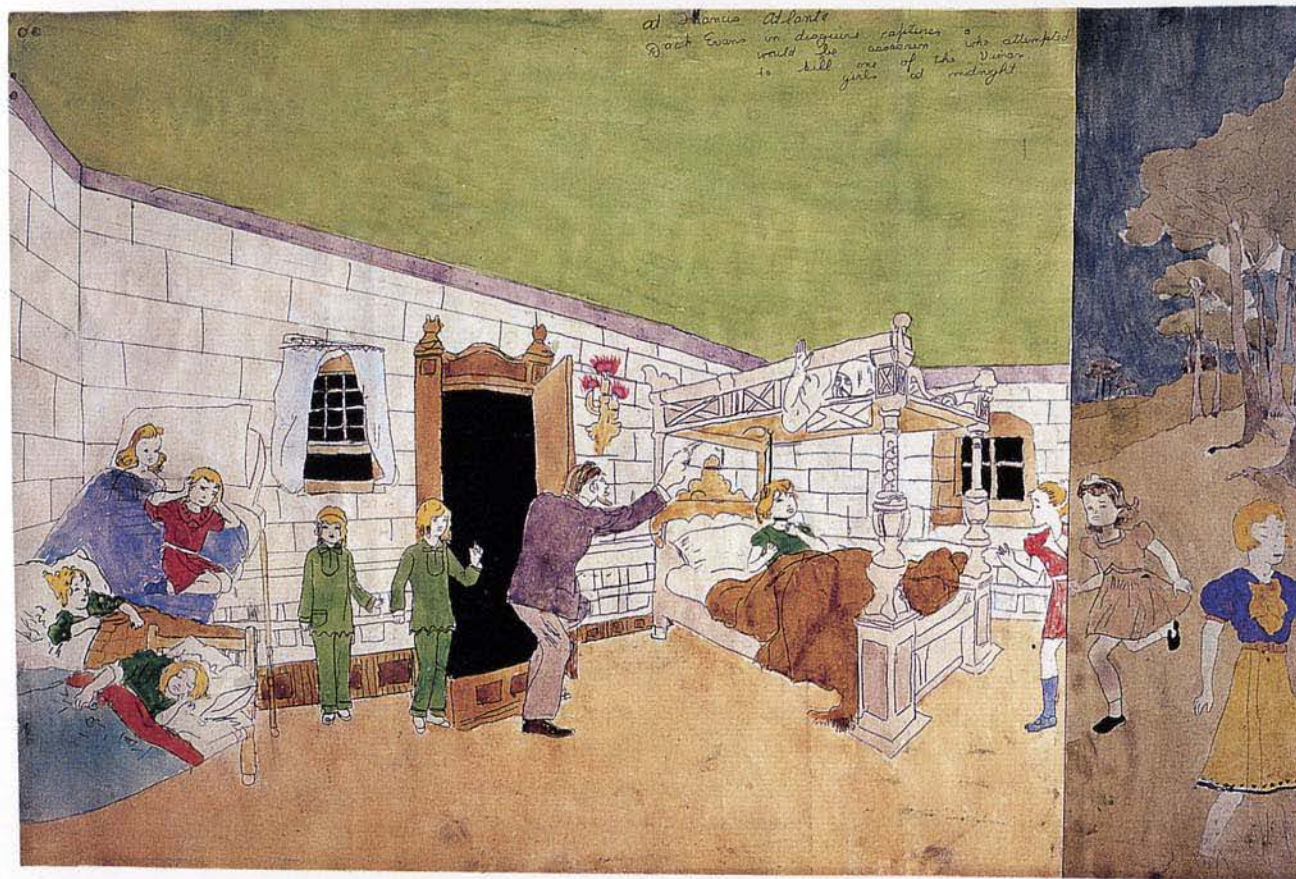
—Jack Evans¹⁷⁵

All of Darger's alter ego representatives appear in the collage-drawings, usually with identifying labels. The one who is depicted more frequently than any other is Jack Ambrose Evans. He is easily recognized because, unlike Darger's boy heroes, Evans is a young adult. As such he is the most convincing of the guardians of the Vivian girls. Called upon with annoying regularity to extricate them from all sorts of dangerous situations, he functions, if not as a father figure, at least as their self-appointed protector.

A picture entitled *At Francis Atlanta. Jack Evans in disguise captures a would be assassin who attempted to kill one of the Vivian girls at midnight* can serve as an introduction to this grown-up boy hero (5.4). The pretext for the picture, and possibly for the narrative as well, is an elaborate four-poster bed, with its own roof. Darger apparently found a picture of this vaguely Jacobean bed and carefully traced it into his drawing. It is almost possible to follow

5.4

Henry Darger
At Francis Atlanta.
Jack Evans in disguise
captures a would
be assassin who
attempted to kill one
of the Vivian Girls at
midnight. Collage-
drawing. Left panel
of a three panel com-
position. 19 x 71 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner



the chain of his associations. With his imagination stimulated by the special bed, he conceives of the little girl in it, and then above her, concealed in the roof, he "discovers" a Glandelinian intruder. These two antagonists are connected by a rope, one end of which passes neatly around the little girl's neck. Evidently Darger's Glandelinian desires have been awakened, with the theme of strangulation at the center of his fantasy.

Given shape initially by the fantastic bed, Francis Atlanta, in this rendering, becomes curiously medieval, with the children's bedroom an austere stone cell. The individual stones of the wall are carefully delineated, with a luminous green ceiling above, and purple trim. All of the Vivian girls are present, five of them in green nightdresses or green pajamas, which echo the color of the ceiling. Evans's Glandelinian uniform, his disguise, is purple rather than gray, so as to conform to the picture's second hue. Through the windows and the open door, night appears as a solid inky black, suggestive of midnight and death. The interior with its tilted floor and dramatically plunging perspective captures the flavor of Darger's naive narrative. It includes only those elements necessary to tell the story. Even without the label we know what is happening. Jack Evans, bursting into the room in the nick of time, captures an intruder, and saves a poor little Vivian girl from suffocation. So abruptly have events unfolded that some of her sisters are still asleep, others just awakening, while two more, in pajamas, are out of bed and participating at least passively as witnesses. If Darger's repressed longings are to be understood as embodied in the

figure of the murderer concealed in the superstructure of the bed, his conscious preoccupation with rescue fantasies finds clear expression in the person of Jack Evans, gun in hand, chief representative in the Realms of the Unreal of Darger's ego.

IT COULD BE ARGUED that all of Darger's alter egos (and more could be identified) suffer from too great a similarity. Although I have tried in writing about them to emphasize the characteristics which distinguish them one from another, it has to be admitted that they do have a tendency to overlap and even merge. They all function as guardians of the Vivian girls, rescuing them from situations and individuals exhibiting otherwise unrestrained libido. All of them are excited by the disturbing loveliness of the seven sisters, but their desires are for the most part held back by an inhibiting awareness of the children's innocence, moral perfection, and supernatural attributes. Because of the formidable defensive operations Darger employed against his otherwise overwhelmingly powerful drives, his heroes, like his heroines, tend to be one-dimensional, with their unrelieved goodness and Catholic moral views providing a sharp contrast to the almost total evil of the Glandelinian enemy. More complex and subtle elements of internal conflict are personified by their shadow selves, their dark companions, brothers and friends.

Jack Evans shares most of these alter ego characteristics, although he lacks a partner or shadow. He does have a brother, John Alexander Vivian Evans, but this brother, who is also listed as one of the guardians of the Vivian girls, is not notably different from Jack, and plays little part in the story.¹⁷⁶ It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Jack Evans's shadow half is Darger himself, but again they too are fundamentally alike, with the adult Evans resembling the Henry Darger then living and working in Chicago more closely than any of the other alter ego figures. Apart from obvious tendencies to idealize his hero, Jack Evans seems to have been intended by Henry to embody his conscious sense of who he was and would wish to be: his urge for masculine and heroic action, his love of and desire for closeness with little girls, his essential modesty, independence, and moral uprightness. Evans is far more present in *The Realms* than the other heroes, playing a major part throughout the war, and interacting with all the boy and girl characters. In the fullest sense, and probably quite consciously, he is Darger's foremost representative in the Realms of the Unreal.

An unexpected comment about Jack Evans, made by one of his foes, Johnston Jacken Manley, may throw light on one of the sources Darger drew on in creating the character of this older boy hero.

"That boy Evans is ... as strong or stronger than Everett True in the Chicago Evening Post I read every evening which comes across the ocean to me in the mails."¹⁷⁷

The parallel suggested by Manley between Evans and the fat, crotchety, middle-aged Everett True of the comic strip is to say the least obscure. Perhaps Darger admired Everett True for other reasons.¹⁷⁸

Jack Evans ages to some extent in the story, moving from boy hero to commanding general, and maturing noticeably along the way. An early portrait exists, depicting Jack as a very young man (see 2.7). Curiously, Darger seems to have adapted this portrait from a photograph of a young woman. Disturbed by the image, he explains: "In the picture he looks young, but nevertheless is much older than his face shows."¹⁷⁹ Perhaps this youthful portrait of Jack Evans was painted to commemorate his role in the child-slave uprising. Despite an incredible confusion of ages and years, we are told that Evans as a boy knew the little girl heroine, Annie Aronburg.

"What I observed during my older days of slavery was enough to arouse anyone, and it was I who really started the insurrection among the child slaves. I in person knew Anna Aronburg ... She was my main assistant in the plot, and she arranged everything so nicely that before long there was the most peculiar rebellion going on that the world ever heard of."¹⁸⁰

It was, of course, the murder of Annie Aronburg that provided a major justification for the great war of 1911. Darger's rage over God's failure to punish the killers of this innocent child is one of the chief reasons for the inability of the Christians to win the war. Evans's intimate connection with the murdered Annie Aronburg is yet another important indication of the close link between Darger and his double.

In that the writing of *The Realms* began when Henry was nineteen, it is possible that Jack's development parallels Darger's own process of growth and maturation. Neither entirely escapes from adolescence. Both are orphans. We are told a lot about Jack's early life, the loss of his parents, and his various activities before the beginning of the war. Clearly, he pre-existed *The Realms*, as did Darger.

The History or life of Jack Evans was not mentioned much, in the first or beginning of the story, and is well to be mentioned now. He was born about fifteen years before the Vivian Girls, and was early in his life an orphan, his father and mother having been killed by the typhoon that struck Calverinia when his mother and parents lived in Calverine.¹⁸¹

He, however, had been adopted by some kind people before he had even the chance to enter an orphan asylum, and at the age of fifteen years old he went out to seek his own employment, and with his brother who also had been an orphan, took up their jobs in Abbieannia at which they had been born. It was at still an early age that he had first met the Vivian Girls.

All through his young life Evans had hardly sinned, but when he had grown older and at the age of ten had been stolen from his adopted parents, and sold in slavery, he had thrived from it, instead of failing, becoming so strong that after he fled from the place, he had the lust to take up prize fighting, and in the ring never lost a battle, and gave his winnings to the poor and helpless, never using a single dollar for himself except what he had to use for his lodgings and food. Finally he got

the Janitors job in St. Joseph's Hospital in Abbieannia, as he himself had told many friends, and there, through Jennie who had been a patient there, learned to know all of the Vivian Girls, became acquainted with their parents and other relations, and became a favorite of the two good brothers of the Vivian Girls.

From this Evans went to College and became a well learned man, and then afterwards enlisted in the army of Abyssinkile and fought his first war when Abyssinkile crashed into Glandelinia in 1899 over the child slave question, and never received a wound and proved himself a hero.¹⁸²

That Evans, like Henry, worked as a janitor in St. Joseph's Hospital, provides the most direct evidence of Darger's conscious identification with his hero. Idealization then allows him to surpass Henry both by becoming a prizefighter and by going to college. It is noticeable, however, that while regularly exaggerating Jack's physical development and strength, Darger plays down his intellectual achievements, allowing him to seem somewhat less than bright. He also informs us that Jack is not really very good looking.

Many have declared that he was not exactly a handsome looking man, but nevertheless who cares how a man looks as long as he is all right in other ways. Evans was perfect not [only] in manners, but also in character. He was very righteous, a Holy young man, and so Saintly that no wonder that Violet and her sisters took to him so easily.¹⁸³

In this way Jack and Henry retain a certain degree of equality, while at the same time compensating for each other's weaknesses.

Perhaps the fundamental quality shared by Darger and his double is internal rage. Describing Jack, Darger writes of "the fire of hatred and rage that is burning within his bosom." Like Darger, Evans as a boy witnessed the cruel and unnecessary suffering of children, and was himself a victim of callous or indifferent adults. Later, confronted with the suffering of the Vivian girls, he responds with suppressed but explosive fury.

Jack Evans who has heard all, saw most of it, and saw their condition many a time, is so cool and quiet that it seems as if he cared nothing about it. But in his heart there is burning a fierce anger, a anger that is extremely dangerous, and someday ... he is going to explode like a mighty volcano being swamped inside by the sea, and then all Glandelinians will rather go to perdition than face his indescribable fury.¹⁸⁴

In accord with Evans's unusual tendency to age somewhat during the course of *The Realms*, his military career develops fairly quickly, encouraged perhaps by his intimate relationship not only with the Vivian girls, but their aristocratic family.

... he a mere promoter, and a Captian of a large Angelinian regiment of cavarly, had the privilege to be their guardian ... Yet he was more than a guardian. He treated them better than general Vivian himself, and almost made the great general jealous.¹⁸⁵

Because of his enormous size and physical strength Jack is much feared by the enemy. He appears in many of the major battles, and Darger makes a point of focusing on his corner of the field so as to report on Evans's valiant deeds, his courage and seeming invulnerability.¹⁸⁶ He takes a peculiarly personal interest in Evans's military prowess, allowing him a degree of aggressive masculinity glimpsed in no other character in *The Realms*. Writing of Evans's furious activity in the war must have provided a marvelous escape from the enervating dullness of his own life. Even as he worked at his janitor's job, or washed dishes, his double was loose in his mind, raging across the battlefield with death and destruction in his wake.

By the end of the war and of the story, Evans has been promoted co-Commending General of all the Christian armies, joining General Hanson Vivian in that august position. It is Evans who plays the leading role in finally bringing the great conflict to its conclusion, though as we have seen he is mysteriously joined by General Henry Darger in the final months of the war. Toward the end of the story the Glandelinians, realizing the part played by Evans in bringing about their defeat, honor him as their "worse" enemy.

Indeed it is very disputable who are and were the worse enemies that the three Manleys ever had. But indeed general Evans proved himself to be the worse, the one who no Glandelinian army no matter what size could lick, or outgeneral, and who could never be frustrated in any conditions.¹⁸⁷

Evans's Relations with the Vivian Girls

In spite of his various contributions to the unfolding story, Jack Evans exists essentially to rescue the Vivian girls; and at times it appears that they exist in order to place themselves in the situations of danger from which they must be rescued. This is not entirely true, since they do manage regularly to get themselves out of tight spots; but if Evans is available, they soon put themselves at risk. Back of this paradox is Darger's obsessional preoccupation with fantasies of rescuing little girls from harm. If he imagined a role for himself in the world this was it. If only in fantasy, he could be important to the children he loved, and by protecting them from danger or persecution, he could come close to them. Jack Evans is fortunate in having seven little girls who are regularly in need of his help.

From Darger's point of view, war has the advantage of separating children from their parents and placing them in situations of extreme peril. Although the Vivian girls, and their girl and boy scout troops, don't usually fight in battle, they are present on the battlefield in various other capacities, and earmarked by the enemy for destruction (5.5). Even in the midst of chaos, Evans still has to keep an eye on his charges.

Suddenly there was a terrible scream high up in the air and with a wake of smoke behind it, a monstrous shell was seen rushing down upon them. It was seen at once that the fearful thing, a veritable high explosive, would strike in their very midst and bursting might destroy a hundred of them.

The men, seeing it coming, scattered but Jennie remained firm. The shell came rushing toward her howling and shrieking like a wild demon bent upon tearing her to pieces for being righteous, but she either did not see her danger or cared nothing about it. As the shell came right at Jennie, Evans turned, uttered a cry of horror, and then dashed straight upon Jennie and bore her to earth, both falling to the ground so violent was the boy's charge, and both rolled for several hundred yards like balls. In another instant the shell struck the ground not twelve yards distant, and exploded with an ear-splitting crash that stunned them both. Gagged fragments of iron was thrown in every direction and for a moment the air was thick with smoke while the pieces of the exploding shell flew over Jennie's head and left her unharmed by the shell. Had she remained standing she would surely have been torn to pieces and killed ...

"Hurrah" cried the men. "She escaped unharmed. Hurrah for Evans her savior."

"I beg your pardon, Jennie, for being so rude" said Evans naively, "but it was the only thing I could think of at the moment."

"Say no more about it, Jack dear," said Jennie with tears of gratitude in her eyes, "Papa will make a general of you when I tell him of your bravery in saving me twice. I had thought that the fearful screaming was from the foe and did not see the shell."¹⁸⁸

5.5

Henry Darger

At Ressurrectoaction Run. Attacked by fierce Glandelinians, one of the Vivians hurls grenades. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper. 18 x 23 1/2 in. Collection of Robert M. Greenberg, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

I at Resurrection Run
attacked by fierce Glandelinian
one of the winning hurl grenades



a shot hits Gennie - falls on
wounding her

Given the legendary indestructibility of the Vivian sisters, and Jack's unfailing ability to intervene at the very last moment, situations such as this must have seemed funny even to Darger. He had a lively sense of humor, and was perfectly capable of making fun of his heroes. Jack's naiveté is not always shared by Darger. Even the children find his excessive fatherly concern for their welfare amusing at times.

"When we got any military work of great necessity to do, he makes me and my sisters go to bed every evening just when we want to read or play, and he's so dreadfully afraid of our getting into too much trouble with the enemy, and has us shadowed secretly wherever we go. Gertrude Angeline once said, 'He worries a great deal more about my sisters and me than there's any necessity for, but we wouldn't tell him so, for we love him so very much.'"¹⁸⁹

If Jack were more intelligent, he would be furious with the little girls for constantly getting into situations from which he has to extricate them. He is, however, aware that as celestial children they have protectors far more powerful than him. As leading military strategists and spies, they also have unusual responsibilities.

Violet and her sisters had wanted to go, but Evans did not like to trust them upon this dangerous errand, but finally, as he was assured by some inward feeling that God would protect them, he decided to yield as their entreaties were so irresistible, and how could he refuse such beautiful little friends when God himself made him know through an inward feeling that the

little girls would softly return. So while the battle was growing wilder and wilder in fury, and while the assaults of the enemy was becoming stronger and stronger, and while the artillery and musketry of both sides was firing in a medlam of damn damanation, Violet and her sisters disguised themselves and set out through a glen far out of reach of the battle maddened fury.¹⁹⁰

MANY OF THE COLLAGE-DRAWINGS involve scenes in which Evans is portrayed actively coming to the rescue of the Vivian girls. An unusually somber example is the darkly glowing landscape entitled *At Jennie Richee. Are rescued by Evans and his soldiers after desperate fight* (5.6). The drawing is unusual in placing Jack right at the center of the composition, and in depicting him with such unusual clarity. At times, Darger envisions him as a giant of a man, his height and build contrasting markedly with Henry's own small stature. In some of these depictions it would seem that he intentionally portrays him as less than handsome, although his blond hair serves to establish his relationship with the Vivian girls. His clothing in this picture, despite the fact that it is in disarray as a result of the fight which is now over, still establishes his adherence to the Christian cause, in its casual incorporation of purple and yellow. The children, all of whom are naked, have no such identifying attributes. As is customary, the Vivian girls are identified by their blond hair. In that the children are unarmed we must assume that the three dead Glandelinians have been dispatched by Evans's club. It is not improbable that Darger employs here a conscious analogy with the biblical incident

in which Samson slays the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.¹⁹¹ It is less likely that Darger saw a parallel between the club held by Evans, and the prominent phallic attributes of the Vivian girls. In order to enhance the accomplishment of his hero, he neglected to depict the soldiers mentioned in the label.

The dark and stormy setting, with the white bodies of the children illuminated by lightning and silhouetted against an expanse of pale green water, emphasizes the anxiety-ridden and isolated situation in which Evans finds himself alone with the little girls. This was the situation Darger sought. All of these rescue scenes can be understood as a struggle for possession. Only by killing off the Glandelinians can Evans achieve the longed-for intimacy with his charges. The scene which follows is invariably one in which the Vivian girls express their gratitude and love for their guardian.

"I believe if it were not for you we would never be happy," said Joice. "Evans you are the dearest friend we ever had." and with that she threw her arms around him and kissed him. Evans placed his arms around her and embraced her, pressing her heart to his.¹⁹²

The essential characteristic separating Darger from his creation is Evans's easy ability to relate with warmth, deep affection, and playful spontaneity to his young charges, the Vivian sisters, and indeed to all of the children in *The Realms*. It is fascinating to observe the shifting levels of closeness with which Jack responds to his little girlfriends, levels which may reflect similar shifts in Darger's consciousness.

Evans noticed their melancholic look and tear brimming eyes. Their beauty had always struck Evans with indescribable motion, and their innocence had greater effect than ever. Never was there a morning when he saw them miss Mass or Holy Communion, and they always sang in the choir. My, what singing! Evans could have sworn that there were angels singing, and not mere human beings. And every time they sang, he seemed fascinated with awe ...

He comforted them in many woes, played every game he knew with them, even ball games for, though little girls as they were, they could throw and catch as an ordinary baseball man, and even use the bat like the batters do and never miss a single strike.¹⁹³

As is the case with all of his alter ego figures, Darger was dependent on Jack Evans for his experience of closeness with the little girls he so loved. But, unlike the boy heroes, Jack's relationship to the children is generally that of an adult relating to a child: always a little distant, but intensely protective, loving, and attentive. As we have seen, Darger hints that the relationship Evans has with the children might even surpass the attachment of parent and child (see plate 6.8).

He did not care a rap what the consequences would be, he only thought of them as if they were his very own daughters, for it was his respect and love for them that made him their guardian. He had started the guardianship himself without anybody's orders, and not even under the authority of general Vivian.¹⁹⁴

While a certain sensuality creeps into his relationship to the little girls, Jack never goes beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable between an adult male and a little girl. He is certainly aware of their beauty, and loves to be with them.¹⁹⁵

"You will come with us." continued Angeline, speaking in a voice of calm certainty which she often used unconsciously.

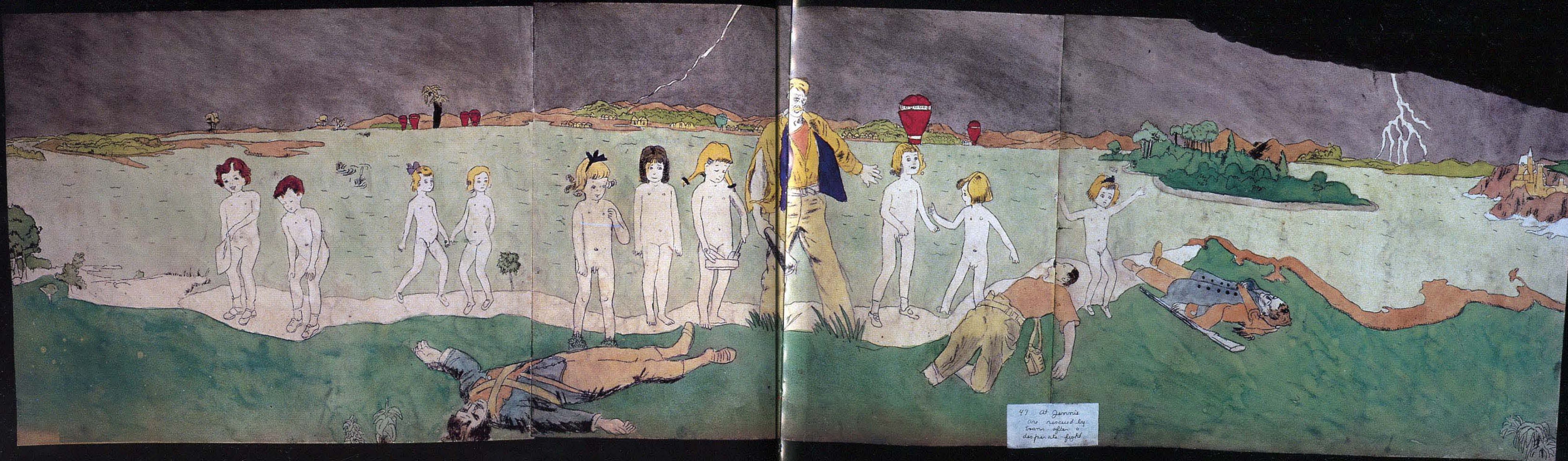
"To come with you or your sisters, or to be with you, would be like heaven to me indeed." said Jack. You bet I shall come with you and I will never forget you." ...

She did not answer, and looking down he saw that she had fallen asleep. The shadows of the solemn evening closed around them deeper and deeper as Jack sat silently holding the frail form to his bosom. He never in his life saw a happier face, and embracing her once more, he placed her head on the pillow.¹⁹⁶

It is, however, of the children's spontaneous response to Evans that Darger most frequently writes. Their love for him is unbounded, far more direct and uncomplicated than their more formal relations with their parents. In part this is because he is younger, more like a big brother than a father. How Henry must have yearned for the love bestowed by these little girls on the gentle giant.

"Oh, how can I thank you?" said Angeline. "How did you know that I liked flowers?" she asked, as he handed them to her. "And it is a beautiful bouquet." she said before he could answer her question. "You arranged them very pretty, and gave them to me. Oh, Jack dear, I love you." she said with a sudden burst of feeling, and laying her little thin white hand on Jack's arm, "I love you. I love you, and only wish that Dear Jesus had you born to me a brother ... I only wish you were my brother, though you are kinder to me than any of my brothers had been ... It's only a little while and then I shall be well again."

Angeline's keen round eyes were overcast with tears, large bright drops rolled heavily down one by one, and fell on Angeline's little white hands. Angeline laid her head against Jack's breast and sobbed, the beautiful child looking to him like the picture of some bright angel trying to reclaim a sinner. In that moment, a regular ray of heavenly love had penetrated Jack's heart, and he hugged her as closely as he could.¹⁹⁷



5.6

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Are rescued by Evans and his soldiers after
desperate fight. Collage-drawing. 19 x 71 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The Tragedy at Brigano

Poor Violet and her sisters. After all they suffered so bravely all the time during the war, and now have this happen to them.¹⁹⁸

In a deeply puzzling document, "Predictions and Threats," Henry Darger threatened God.¹⁹⁹ Among the ways in which he considered punishing the deity, one is of particular importance to us, at this juncture, since it was carried out, at least in part.

March 16, 1916 passed. Little hope of christian success now. War may surely be lost. Year already close to end it being near November ... Tragedy at Brigano. [Be]Cause of Aronburg mystery. Vivian Girls almost fatally injured. Their lives will really be lost on July 4, nineteen fourteen if lost manuscript is not returned by that time ... In this case under this serious situation, there will be no mercy shown whatever. The loss of pictures of children, manuscript, and rejection from Glandelinian army shall be avenged.²⁰⁰

After confronting his God with the possibility of serious harm befalling the Vivian girls, Darger now arranges for his threat to be carried out in the Realms of the Unreal. The precious little children are horribly injured at a place called Brigano. The Tragedy of Brigano is referred to again and again, and was evidently an event of unique significance to Henry. He had kept his word. In the context of *In The Realms of the Unreal*, his defiance of God could be realized. Perhaps it was only his love for these children he had created that prevented their deaths on July 4, 1914.

While Darger was obviously operating behind the scenes, it is to Jack Evans that he assigned at least some of the responsibility for bringing the tragedy about. The great protector of the Vivian girls is therefore unable to prevent his beloved friends from being mutilated, blinded, and disfigured. For a time they are even expected to die. The tragedy strikes with extreme suddenness, and without any prior warning.

As soon as the Glandelinians were out of sight, and the cannon fire was ceasing, the little girls came out of their hiding place and started for the nearest town ... It seemed their only safty just now and they sprang forward. Just as they reached a house, there came a thousand withering flashes, followed by a terrible damanating roar, and the little girls felt something like timbers strike them, and then all seemed dark, except to Angeline who alone remained conscious for a few minutes.

An hour after they came to, and found themselves lying in snow white beds and suffering fearful pain. Evans was bending over them with tears in his eyes. "You little girls came close to twenty deadly mines which blew up," he said sadly.²⁰¹

Normally, Darger would neatly arrange for the children to escape unscathed from an event such as this. That on this occasion they are horribly wounded clearly involves a new decision on his part, with serious psychodynamic implications. He plays with the theme of tragedy. The full extent of the seven children's injuries only becomes apparent over time. Darger constructs the fearful situation with calculated reticence.

Indeed, the little girls were horribly mangled and were fairly tossing in agony. Their bodies had been frightfully lacerated. Violet's leg and arm had been frightfully torn and broken in three places, and all had injuries equally as bad or worse.

Given his free associational writing style, he could elaborate on their injuries at will. At first the focus is on pain.

The doctor who was preparing to operate on them had great doubts if the little girls would live, but afterwards he declared that they could be saved if kept perfectly quiet, but that nevertheless they may be horribly disfigured and crippled for life.

All of the little girls had been later on operated on, and sad to say, without any antiseptic [anesthetic?], as none could be had. And who can imagine what they suffered when the operation was going on ... After the operation the little girls looked like lost souls.

Ultimately their injuries are made to seem far more severe, with the children hovering on the edge of death.

"From a throughout examination I found out my answer can be perfectly correct." answered the doctor very sadly. "The injuries are fearful, terribly fearful — and deep seated. It will be even several weeks before their horrible suffering will even cease. At to their being disfigured or crippled for life, it is the absolute truth without any lies or mistakes about it. It is a wonder they will live as it is. And as you see, they are seriously damaged. But I fear sometimes that they won't even live long. Every one of them had their eyes injured, and Jennie And Catherine have fractured skulls. If they do live I fear the worse nevertheless. Blindness, deformities, and disfigurement." ... "I'm doing my best." said the doctor, "But just now I'm sorry to say they do not seem, but positively are, beyond all medical aid whatever ... only the good God can prevent what is coming to your daughters. Pray to him, and offer him a reward, and probably they may come out of it all right."

Here the multiple layers of the real and the imaginary begin to merge, since Darger's rage was inspired by the repeated failure of God to respond to prayers. In truth, the fate of the Vivian girls is in Darger's hands. The tables are turned, with the Christian God now the passive victim of Darger's irrational acts.

WITHIN *THE REALMS* the question of guilt and responsibility is explored in terms of who is to blame for what has happened to the little girls. Evans blames himself for the tragedy at Brigano. It was he who set the landmines in place. Darger, of course, is not mentioned as having played any part in the destruction of the children, but to the extent that Evans is involved, we can easily recognize Darger's role in the unfolding of this terrible act. However, faced with accepting responsibility for what is a gesture of truly monstrous defiance, both Darger and Evans must needs find a way out. Ultimately, Darger is incapable of allowing his heroines to die, while Evans must find a way to reassign the blame.

It had indeed been a tragedy. Evans regiment alone had stood its ground against fearful odds and during the very second repulse the christian engineers had set a score of mines, which unknown to them had been exploded by the Glandelinians at the command of Germania [Vivian] as the rascal saw the little girls approach the location, and the poor little girls, springing for refuge, had ran close to one of the nearest mines, which blasted that shelter to fragments and mangled the little girls ... This was probably the worst thing that ever happened to the Vivian Girls that anyone can remember.

General Vivian, in fact, half blamed Evans for the disaster, for it had been his mines that did the damage, but nevertheless knowing that Evans was really innocent of it all, and that the Glandelinians had blasted the mines instead, he was afraid to say anything to him.²⁰²

This is a rare instance of Darger's seeming to experience real conflict. He is caught in his own trap, unable either to accept what he has done, or to project the blame successfully beyond himself. It is the only occasion on which any of his more specific "Predictions and Threats" are realized. As a result, he and his alter ego Evans are forced to struggle with intolerable guilt.

I don't believe anyone could have seen a more broken hearted personage than Evans. He felt that he was mainly the cause of it, and cursed himself for not making sure that the enemy would not blast the mines themselves. He was mad at both himself and Germania Vivian, at Germania for his foolhardy persecutions and for blasting the mines, and at himself for not watching the mines more closely. He had left the room where the little girls lay, unable to bear the sight, and half weeping himself, he went out into the cold blizzard.

The tragic situation of the Vivian sisters, unique in the entire work that is *The Realms*, will finally be resolved in an extraordinary manner. But before this mystical resolution is arrived at, their disfiguring wounds provide another test for Evans, which reveals both the depth of his feelings for the children, as well as puzzling concerns playing beneath the surface of Darger's mind. Henry was never certain of the nature or depth of his feelings for little girls. Was he attracted only to their beauty? "Is the attraction for the children, if that is what it is, worthy or is it the main hinderance?"²⁰³ Evans, at least, comes through the test with a truer understanding of his feelings. He reveals this in an impassioned statement to the children's father.

"I suppose because they will be disfigured for life and crippled you will lose your love for them?" said general Vivian seriously. THIS HE SAID TO TRY HIM. "Most people love women and children because they are only pretty, and if anything happens to disfigure them, they are only in the way afterwards."

"General Vivian, if you mean what you say, then you are no friend of mine!" protested Evans. "Beauty, Ha. I detest outward beauty more than the devil. Violet and her sisters were beautiful, more beautiful than I have ever seen children before, but that I hardly noticed. Their manners were more beautiful than their features; their beautiful, clean, loving souls is what struck me. And their kindness to all the wounded, enemy or friend, to the poor children in Calverine and other cities, and the misery and torture they went through, was what took the greatest effect upon me. Not a sin of any kind ever stained their souls, and whenever they heard blasphemies and curses it made them cry. Their condition now only makes me saddened and almost broken hearted, and when I think of their being disfigured and crippled for life——"

"Oh, I can't——bear to speak——of it."

Death and Transfiguration

Part of Darger's intention in permitting the Vivian girls to be seriously hurt is to arrange for a miraculous cure which will bring them closer to sainthood. The mechanism is one which will become very familiar: Eruptions of violence or of sadistic sexuality provoke counter-balancing waves of Christian mysticism or Catholic moralizing. Both he and Jack Evans use religion and a sense of the mystical to keep their libidinal drives strictly under control. Having experienced the torments of the damned, as well as the near approach of death, the Vivian girls are mysteriously transformed, their recovered beauty miraculously enhanced by suffering.

Returning from a long period of making war, Jack Evans notices four lovely little strangers:

After many weary days had been passed, Evans travelling through country after country and pursued a hundred times in three weeks by Glandelinians and strange christians ... finally reached the region of Jennie Vivian, where that great battle had raged ...

As he proceeded on, he saw sitting on the porch four fair little girls, really ten times more [beautiful] than the Vivian girls could ever have been ... Then he paused in overpowering emotion and awe, for from these pretty children a strange fragrance as of the most sweetest flowers, a strange odor that was completely divine, that filled the air, and as he gazed at them, he discovered that they were etherically beautiful and wore the most beautiful white guasy dresses, whiter than the most

great whiteness could ever be dreamed of, while the strong moonlight surrounded them with a soft radiance. "Angels indeed" he thought to himself ...

"Oh, Evans dear, you have come back! ... We are your beautiful friends called the 'Vivian Girls,' and we have recovered from the mine explosion, and are not disfigured, blind, or crippled at all as what was feared."²⁰⁴

The beauty of his little friends has been so incredibly enhanced by their martyrdom that Jack is unable to recognize them. A marvelous piece of theater. But what Darger is after is far more than mere beauty. With *The Realms* nearing its end, he seeks to lift his celestial children closer to the Divine, to make of them something so ideal, so perfect, as to be unattainable. The culminating scene, toward which he moves with great care, takes place at night in a ruined chapel, where Evans finds the sisters at prayer.

Evans felt a lump rise in his throat, as he lighted a torch and peered in. Peering forward through the darkness toward the Sanctuary, the voices of the weeping Vivian Girls seemed nearer and more piteously plaintive at every step. Then, as he finally neared the altar rail, he saw near the unharmed statue of our Lady, the fair little Vivian Girls weeping piteously.

"My poor little angels," he said, approaching them with deep pity. Then he paused, for from the children came the same fragrance that he had noticed many times before, a beautiful fragrance as of the most sweetest flowers in heaven, this odor filling the whole Sanctuary, and he saw as he put out the torch, that through some

means they suddenly seemed etherically beautiful to behold, and wore beautiful guazy dresses whiter than whiteness could be dreamed of, which he never saw them have on when they entered the church, while also to his surprise a soft radiance as of moonlight surrounded them. He was seized with a great feeling of awe and said, "Don't cry little angels." and pulling little Jennie to him, held her tightly in a fond embrace. "Don't cry dear little girls" ... to his surprise he fancied he saw a luminous golden halo appear above the fair heads of each of the little girls. A feeling of strange awe came over him, an overpowering sense of being among the celestial inhabitants of God's heavenly kingdom.

"Divinely beautiful" he thought as he helped them one by one over the wreckage. "Surely, before God himself, there is none other like them in this whole world."²⁰⁵

The gently romantic and mystical mood Darger is evoking here will be reflected in a series of magnificent collage-drawings, which we will examine in the following chapter. The drawings, the largest and most beautiful Darger was to do, are identified as *The Children in the Garden*.²⁰⁶ They are associated with an unexplained physical merging of innocent, usually naked, children and the child-bodied winged Blengiglomenean serpents. Influenced by the mystical traditions of his church, and by some of its more banal imagery, he forces his love of little girls into transcendental, and no doubt heretical, imagery, safely unreal.²⁰⁷

Evans indeed was overawed at the appearance of Violet and her sisters as they reached their resting place; the looks of holy innocent little girls transfigured, or the rapt serenity of seven little child saints who had held communication with the supernatural.

Even the soldiers with them were silent at this sight, and they were now aware of a celestial fragrance permeating the air, the same ravishing perfume that had sweetened the Sanctuary of the ruined church. The odor lingered and sweetened all the atmosphere about them, an odor not of earth's fading flowers, but distilled from the roses and lilies of Paradise. Evans remained with the little girls, the odor now proceeding from him also, as it adhered to his uniform.²⁰⁸

Subjective Genealogy: From Uncle Jack to Uncle Henry

Evans's experience of the children as heavenly beings brings us closer than any other evidence to Darger's conscious and idealized image of himself and his worshipful feelings for little girls. On the other hand, it was the underlying unconscious drives and fantasies which necessitated his exaggerated veneration of the child as a perfect and holy being. With a slight adjustment, from Roman Catholicism to High Church Anglicanism, Darger's feelings approach Lewis Carroll's carefully conceived rationalizations of his longings for similar untouchable objects of desire. Anyone with real experience of children will see these idealized little girls as products of outlandishly unrealistic, if not pathological, fantasy.

Writing of Jack Evans for years on end may have encouraged Darger and Evans to grow closer, more alike. Similarly, the long association of the Vivian girls and their trusted guardian involved an increasing degree of intimacy which inevitably lead, in Darger's way of thinking, to a deeply felt need for a familial relationship. But how is such a transformation to be accomplished between the Evans and Vivian families? Toward the end of *The Realms*, Darger seems to be seeking a way to accomplish this union.

As they travelled alongside the roaring flood and watched its wild torrents with awe, Evans drew Angeline and Jennie to his side and said, "I believe indeed that you little girls are becoming like little sisters to me. How would it be if your papa allowed me to become a brother to you?"

"A brother to us?" said Jennie. "Why we thought he said yes long ago." And she placed her arm around him, Evans drawing her and Evangeline tighter to him.

When he let them go again, Angeline said with beaming eyes; "Do you know Evans that our old homes are near Marcucian by the Pandora railroad and they are the places where we can see the volcano of Mt. Calverine more closely?"²⁰⁹

At this point Evans, or perhaps Henry, in reply makes a strangely significant slip.

"Yes, little Evangeline, I knew they were somewhere there," said Evans, "as your husband, I mean your father, told me so."

Angeline looked at him with surprise and amazement, as she said, "I would look fine for a husband. For my size he could eat me alive if he felt hungry enough. You certainly do speak funny things, Evans."²¹⁰

The word husband is infrequently used in *The Realms*. It seems to belong to a reality other than "the Unreal." That Jack makes such a slip probably implies that for a moment he has been thinking of a relationship to the sisters other than that of an adopted brother.²¹¹ In his case, since he at least is an adult, the idea of marriage is not so far-fetched. However, as the Vivian girls are all still pre-adolescent, the idea does appear strange to them, as Angeline seems to point out, with her frightening image of being eaten alive by a husband because she is so small. This is as close as Evans, and presumably Darger, ever came to proposing marriage.

Instead, a different and not totally rational solution is found. Jack's early history is rewritten one last time. In the process Evans's origins, and Darger's, are brought into surprising closeness, as their histories begin, irrationally, to merge. At the center of the shifting story is the rarely encountered mother of the Vivian girls [plate 5.7]. Who is she? For the first time reference is made to her history, and to her maiden name. Jack Evans is in conversation with a girl scout, Hazzel Manning.

"They [the Vivian Girls] don't know their own mother's maiden [name].²¹² Well, that sure is a queer state of things. She didn't often mention her family to her daughters then?"

"She very often spoke of her father, and brother, she loved them dearly."

A wave of some strong emotion swept over general Jack Evans' face, and for a moment the hand resting on the table trembled visibly ... Then he spoke, and his voice shook in spite of all his efforts at self control — "She loved them, you say — loved them dearly to the last ... Sit down again and tell me some more about the mother of the Vivian Girl Princesses. — I've got an idea that I used to know her a long, long time ago."

"You knew the mother of Violet and her sisters?"

"I knew a little girl, when I was a little boy, who answers pretty well to her description. She was a child slave under a Glandelinian slave plantation master by the name of Ernest St. Claire, and she fled to a foreign country to escape her master ... I have known who Violet and her sisters were, and their brothers, and who their

mother was too, from the first day I saw them. The likeness were unmistakable, and then there were the names."...

"You mean to say, their mother's last name was Evans? You knew her long ago — was she — was she any relation of yours?"

"She was my ['mother' crossed out] sister," said general Evans solemnly.²¹³

Darger was evidently profoundly upset by the material he was typing. This is evident by the number of slips and typing errors. He understands that Evans is very moved by the material being discussed, and indicates it with large numbers of pauses portrayed by extended dashes. He was touching on the untouchable, the deepest secrets of his own childhood. He has inserted the word "mother" when he meant to type "sister." It is obvious that he is about to describe the traumatic events of his own early life: the death of his mother, and the simultaneous loss of his sister. He was displacing all these events onto Evans, but was still coming too close to his own buried memories. Evans's tragic childhood is therefore revised here to conform to his own experiences.

"The enemy thieves stole her from my mother's door. It almost broke her heart, and she died from grief, and it broke my heart at the same time. In resisting them they killed my father and carried me off too ... Can you blame me if I can never forgive the foes what they did to my mother and sister, and my relations the Vivian Girls? I am their own uncle, and since they've gone to Wickey Landsinia — I — I — am very lonely."²¹⁴

5.7

Henry Darger

At Julio Callio, Via Norma. Though all are annihilated, the Vivian girls and their mother and aunt escape with their lives, though their parent and aunt are severely injured about their heads. Their mother and aunt saved two children. Collage-drawing. Center panel of three panel composition. 19 x 71 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Out of all this historical revision come crucial new facts: The mother of the Vivian girls is seen to be Jack Evans's lost sister. He admits to having known this for a long time, ever since he came to know the Vivian girls. Only now does he reveal the amazing fact, he is the princesses' maternal uncle!

More important, however, is his new account of the terrible events which destroyed his early life: the enemy abducted his sister, carrying her off into slavery; his mother then died of grief (presumably at the very moment). His father was also killed on the spot, and Jack, still a boy, was taken away to become a child slave.²¹⁵ These changes to the previous versions of Jack's life history were introduced by Darger in order to bring his history and Evans's more or less into conformity. Allowing for dramatic exaggeration, he allows Evans to share his own tragic early experience: the simultaneous loss of his mother and baby sister; the death of his father (perhaps it was Darger senior who died of grief), and his "abduction" by evil Glandelinians, first to a home for boys and then to the asylum.

What Darger and his double now share is the soul-destroying loss of everything that mattered, the loss of Paradise. Nevertheless, this painful revisiting of the past does provide Darger with the unique fantasy that his lost sister has had a life, has given birth to the seven wonderful little girls who for so many years have been his friends. He is not utterly alone, but is instead an uncle, and his nieces, the mysteriously perfect Vivian girls.

When he was alone, Captain Darger pondered on the situation. He had always been longing for once to see those frail creatures called the Vivian girls and to know them as well. He loved children very dearly ... He knew, however, that to approach the Vivian girls he must do the same as preparing for Holy Communion, he must be in a state of grace.

—Henry J. Darger²

*Ye golden hours of Life's young spring,
Of innocence, of love and truth!
Bright, beyond all imagining,
Thou fairy-dream of youth!
I'd give all wealth that years have piled,
The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer-day.*
—Lewis Carroll³



A MAN OF CHILD WORSHIP: Darger and the Vivian Girls¹

The sleeping mind dreams; the mind awake indulges, to an extent most of us would be reluctant to acknowledge, in fantasy. As well, psychoanalysis directs our attention to the presence of unconscious fantasies, existing outside of our control and beneath the level of consciousness, powerfully driven mental constructs which subtly influence and shape the functioning of both thought and behavior. Although fragmentary, these subjective inventions, these imaginary experiences carefully veiled from the outside world, and in part from ourselves, represent a secret life that is lived only in fantasy. To the extent that this fantasy life differs from our external world, it can be said to represent a more or less consistent second life, an alternate existence.⁴

For most of us our fantasy existence departs only minimally from conventional reality, correcting small segments of our life situation in terms of our internal needs, imaginatively bringing fragments of our life situation into line with our desires. In some individuals, however, the life of fantasy seems to become, or remain, richer, more dominant, and less fragmentary. There can be a tendency for specific fantasies to go on being elaborated over months or even years. These "ongoing fantasies" grow cumulatively, becoming more complex and detailed with time. Fantasy then becomes the dominant mode, at the expense of adaptation to the real world. Preoccupying an individual mind, invariably with compulsive, and occasionally delusional, intensity, these alternate worlds, or paracosms, if they become known, are dismissed as evidence of eccentricity or even insanity.⁵ Called into being to satisfy the special needs of their creators and imaginatively "occupied" by them in complete isolation, they very rarely find external expression in written or graphic form.⁶

THIS CHAPTER concerns itself with ongoing fantasies of a specific kind: those involving an imaginary relationship between a man and a child, for the most part a little girl. At a certain point in his life Henry Darger seems to have realized that he was an unusual kind of man, "a man of child worship." The term is his. Disregarding the dictates of reality and the demand that he mature, he indulged throughout his life in fantasy relationships with little girls, chief among them the seven Vivian sisters. Our purpose is to explore these relationships which existed only in his mind and in his art.⁷ Our investigation into the nature of these imaginary forms of closeness will be enlarged and deepened through comparison with an earlier and more famous child-worshipping artist, the writer and photographer Lewis Carroll, pseudonym of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-98).

Darger called the Vivian girls into existence. They existed nowhere but in his mind and art. Clearly, they were part of him, aspects of his identity. It is essential to bear this fact in mind as we proceed. The Vivian girls, and all other children in *The Realms*, are projections, fragments of Darger's internal reality. The Henry Dargers we encounter in the story are also an invention. The relationships that are described as existing between the fictional character Henry J. Darger and his fantasy children existed only in the author's mind. Surprisingly, contacts between the fictional Darger and the Vivian girls in *The Realms* occur rather infrequently. Even in fantasy he could not risk more than superficial direct encounters with these children he had created. So far as we know, Darger had little or nothing to do with real children; no objective little girls served as models for the Vivian sisters and their friends.⁸

THERE WAS, however, one little girl who pre-existed all of Darger's fictional characters, a child who paradoxically existed both in the real world and exclusively in Darger's imagination: the sister he "never saw or knew her name." Given up for adoption soon after her birth, she obviously existed somewhere, perhaps even in Chicago. But for Henry she existed only in his mind as a little sister who he could summon into being in fantasy. He spoke of her directly on only one occasion, but she appears to have gone on existing in his unconscious: a powerful and perfect child, never maturing past childhood, and living not in a family but in an orphanage.⁹ It was this missing child with whom Darger felt an ambivalent connection so intense as to verge on identification, this little girl who underlay all of his fantasy creation. The essential fact necessitating the existence of the Vivian girls is that they are sisters, one little girl split into seven.¹⁰ Disturbingly merged with his dead mother (and through her birth the cause of his mother's death), this child was an object both of intense longing and equally intense and unconscious hate. She is present everywhere in *The Realms*. The first and last real object of his love, this lost little girl became and remained the sexual object beyond which he was never to go. Precisely because she existed for Henry only in imagination, his sexuality remained trapped in adolescent fantasy and fixated on little girls. The hold of this child on his mind is, however, ultimately only understandable in terms of her actual existence in the world. Henry sought her in every little girl, in every picture of a little girl he ever saw. And because both he and she remained trapped in childhood, he continued to look for her as a child throughout his life.¹¹ Already in childhood he had become "a man of child worship."



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The first object of Darger's love was, of course, his mother. What is apparent is that his memories of her underwent total repression as a result of the massive trauma associated with her death. Darger didn't know her name, and mentions her only once. She appears nowhere in his creation; mothers are seldom spoken of or depicted in *The Realms*. Adult women played no part in Darger's fantasy, and inspired little other than hostility in his real life. Sexually they were unapproachable; adult sexuality itself was taboo.

His father, on the other hand, is represented in *The Realms* in the person of Governor Hanson Vivian, the Vivian girls' uncle. At the very beginning of the story Hanson loses both his wife and little daughter as a result of a violent tornado. Such storms, endlessly repeated in Darger's writings, always represented his traumatic childhood experience of sudden death, loss, and destruction.¹² Governor Robert Vivian, with whom Darger clearly identifies, is blessed in possessing seven perfect little daughters, as well as three, far less significant, older sons.

Lewis Carroll and Alice

*Carroll looked at himself, and the image he saw reflected in his mirror was the face of Alice (or he looked at Alice, and saw the reflection of his own face.)*¹³

Having begun to explore some of the psychological factors underlying Henry Darger's invention of an alternate world centering on imaginary little girls, it would now be of interest to consider briefly the very different route whereby Lewis Carroll arrived at a no less obsessional involvement with child worship. Carroll differed from Darger in that his sexual drives and unconscious fantasies led him to continual, clearly compulsive, involvements of various kinds with a large number of very real little girls. His adaptation to society was far more realistic than Darger's, and he was therefore able to engineer surprisingly complex and intimate child friendships, carried out with the knowledge and permission of the children's parents. This, despite the fact that in his dealings with adults (as Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) he was painfully shy and awkward, and emotionally remote. He suffered from a serious stutter when speaking with grownups. He had no deep friendships with men; and no ability to form intimate relationships with women. He never married, and in considerable areas of his life he, like Darger, remained a child. A profound psychological split separated his adult existence, such as it was, from his rich and active lifelong involvement with children and with fantasy. The life of Charles Dodgson, professor of mathematics and logic at Oxford University, teacher and writer on mathematical subjects, was to a large extent undermined by the parallel existence of Lewis Carroll, whose passionate quest for little

girlfriends consumed much of his energy and all of his creativity and imaginative activity. The radical split in his life and personality, denied by many of his biographers, is more than evident.¹⁴ He was comfortable only with little girls. Easily able to win their interest and affection, he could engage in games and storytelling, relaxed play and gentle flirtation, which were totally spontaneous on both sides. He did not like boys.

The fact that Carroll was able to form friendships with actual children should not obscure the fact that these relationships were profoundly, indeed fundamentally, imbued with fantasy. Attracted to physical beauty of form and face, rather than to any awareness of children as individuals, he used little girls as objects upon which he could project his internal vision of childhood. As with Darger, unconscious processes of identification seem to have played an essential part in what were often brief encounters. While several of his more than a hundred friendships with little girls lasted over a period of years, all of them almost invariably ended, or changed radically, when the child reached puberty.¹⁵

The most important child friendship of Carroll's life would seem to have been that formed with Alice Liddell, who he first encountered in 1856 when he was twenty-four and she was but three. At the age of ten she became the model for the Alice around whom the story of Alice in Wonderland first evolved. The intimate phase of their friendship ended in 1863, seemingly as a result of Carroll having done something that permanently alienated her parents.¹⁶

While it is unlikely that Carroll ever became involved in an overtly sexual way with any of his little friends, his attraction to little girls was very evidently not without a sexual component. Writing of this aspect of Carroll's life, one of his more courageous biographers, Jean Gattegno, says:

*Carroll's relationships with little girls undoubtedly represent the most sensitive problem his biographers have to tackle ... there was a tremendous emotive and sexual content in Carroll's relationships with little girls. It was in them, and there alone, that he sought to satisfy his sexual urges.*¹⁷

In this respect Carroll and Darger are similar. It is clear that for both of these men children's sexual innocence or purity was an essential factor permitting them to relate to little girls as love objects, while avoiding any necessity for mature sexual response. While Carroll's attraction to the bodies of little girls was very evidently sexual, he responded with the sexuality of a boy, enjoying them as a source of visual excitement (elaborately developed voyeurism), and of innocent physical contact, holding hands, hugging, and especially kissing. Aware that such intimacies might prove offensive to some parents, he wrote surprisingly direct letters to the mothers of his young charges asking if their daughters were "kissable," and pointing out that, "With girls under fourteen, I don't think it necessary to ask the question."¹⁸ Evidently, the more innocent things Darger dreamt and wrote of doing, Carroll did.

It is not difficult to account for the fact that Darger was restricted to fantasy, while Carroll was able to express his fantasies with actual little girls. While Henry invented seven Vivian sisters to relate to in fantasy, Charles Dodgson was fortunate in possessing the real thing. His large family exactly

resembled the Vivian family in that he actually had seven sisters and three brothers. He himself was the eldest son. Living in a remote country parish, Charles spent the first five years of his life surrounded by girls, with his five oldest sisters his only playmates. He was four years old when his first brother was born.

Enjoying in reality the ideal experience which Darger could only know in fantasy, Charles might have been expected to mature along markedly different lines. That he failed to do so, and, indeed, remained as strongly fixated in fantasy and in childhood experience as Darger, obviously requires explanation. Unfortunately, almost nothing is known of his childhood, or of his early relations with his parents and siblings. In the absence of fact, psychological investigators have been forced to indulge in speculation in order to account for the bizarre, and clearly pathological, patterns that make themselves apparent in Dodgson's/Carroll's later life.¹⁹ What is clear is that he was absolutely at home only with little girls, and that they were the only people to whom he could respond emotionally. On the other hand, the hundreds of letters he wrote to little girls reveal an emotional intensity and character that is frequently not suited to a child recipient.²⁰

*The emotion he poured into these friendships is terrifying in its intensity, its underlying sense of loss, its one-sidedness ... In every letter he penned to little girls, sadness co-exists with relief in pouring out his longings; he is the suitor who expects rejection because he knows his quest can go nowhere.*²¹ As with Darger, Carroll's ideal relationship was that of brother and sister, or fantasy guardian and protector. Unlike Darger, Carroll seems to have had no fantasies of adoption. He resembled Darger

in having no interest whatever in babies. Fixated on their sisters from childhood on, both men seem to have erected powerful, indeed pathological, defenses against the danger of incest: Carroll because of his enforced intimacy with his sisters; Darger because of the fact that any sexual relationship he might enter into contained the possibility of incest with a sister he could not recognize.

In Search of Adventure

The American child-hero — Are there any American child-heroines?

—W. H. Auden²²

Emerging fully formed from Darger's imagination, and only now, over eighty years later, finding their way out into the world, the Vivian girls are a marvelous literary invention, the product of a rich and endlessly playful fantasy. They are destined to take their place beside Alice and Dorothy, Wendy and Charlotte, as child heroines produced by the male imagination.²³ Unlike these individual heroines whose names are so familiar to us, the Vivian sisters will always be remembered as a collective, a small but effective unit, rather than as seven distinct individuals. This despite the fact that Darger pauses from time to time in *The Realms* to remind the reader of their names and ages: Violet Mary 9 1/2, Joice Catherine 10, Jennie Frances 10, Catherine Cecilia 7, Daisy Gertrude 7, Hettie Annie 8, and Angeline (or Evangeline) Celestine 9.²⁴ It is surely of significance that in inventing these fourteen names, he didn't stumble unconsciously on that of his mother, Rosa or Rosie. Perhaps it is important that two of the children do have names derived from flowers. Darger would, on the other hand,

have been fully conscious of the possibility that he might accidentally have chosen the name of the sister whose name he never heard. It is almost as if, by having seven heroines instead of one, there was a greater chance that she might be included, though he would never know.

Over the course of this enormous history, one or another of the children seems to assume a more prominent role and is spoken of, or speaks, more frequently. Darger usually attempted to distribute speeches or actions fairly evenly among the seven girls, but ultimately it is Violet who emerges as the dominant sister, as she is referred to more often than any of the others. The seven children tend to merge in our imagination, appearing less as individuals than as small duplicates of each other. All of their characteristics are shared, and Darger seems to have assumed that this would inevitably be the case with sisters. It is quite impossible, even after reading thousands of pages, to detect anything resembling individual personality in these children. This is true of most of Darger's characters, even those who do emerge as individual units in terms of their roles in the story. In the collage-drawings the Vivian girls are readily distinguished from other children by their blond hair and usually identical outfits, but nothing but Darger's labels can enable us to tell them one from another. He actually seems to relish this confusion, and he delighted in tracing the same figure seven times as if to enhance the puzzling similarities (6.1). His lack of concern with the task of differentiating between his heroines suggests that somewhere in his mind they are one child simply multiplied by seven. It then becomes important to inquire what

was gained by this replication. Perhaps the confusion provided by seven indistinguishable little girls provided an opportunity for Darger to insert himself unnoticed as one of the group.

There is strength in numbers, and given their relative fragility as small girls, the survival of the sisters is dependent upon their ability to support and defend each other. Seven little girls are certainly more difficult to deal with than one. As a result of a childhood spent in institutions, Darger may have recognized the unusual power of a group of children acting together. It is also possible that on a deeper level fantasizing about a group of seven little girls was somehow safer than an imaginary involvement with one vulnerable little girl might have been. On the other hand, Lewis Carroll, in his dealings with real children, strongly preferred relating to one girl at a time when this was possible. In a letter to a mother he inquires:

*Would you kindly tell me if I may reckon your girls as inevitable to tea, or dinner, singly. I know of cases where they are inevitable in sets only (like the circulating library novels), and such friendships I don't think worth going on with.*²⁵

Darger clearly preferred "sets."

Like Carroll, Darger responded primarily to the beauty of little girls, though both men tended to describe that beauty as reflecting the moral perfection and innocence of a child. The Vivian sisters are regularly, indeed compulsively, described as disturbingly beautiful, unnerving in their radiant perfection. They themselves are aware of their beauty, and often apologize for its disturbing effect. Even Darger is vulnerable to its unsettling impact.

It was evidently perfect to general Darger that there was nothing whatever that could daunt the little girls, and he did not know what to make of their bravery at all. To him the little girls were not mere children. They seemed children with natures beyond comprehension, and whose bravery outrivalled the fiercest lions ... He almost feared the little girls himself. Pretty indeed as the prettiest angels, graceful in every form, but their looks showed indeed what they really were, and there was a peculiar light in their eyes which showed danger lurking there.²⁶

Early in the story a sense of deep mystery begins to be associated with the children. Later supernatural and religious explanations are offered to account for their unnatural splendor and indestructibility (see chapter 12). Carroll too sought to explain his attraction to little girls in religious terms. "It is good for one [I mean, for one's spiritual life, and in the same sense that reading the Bible is good] to come into contact with such sweetness."²⁷

Concerned with intelligence (his own), Darger bestows it liberally on his child heroines. The Vivian girls, while remaining children, interact on equal or superior terms with all adults. They speak and act with the assurance of grownups, and readily detect stupidity in adult enemies. Their opinions are listened to with interest and respect by leading Christian generals, and they play an active role in military planning. They are regularly entrusted with vitally important messages, and, as we will see, they function admirably as spies looking in on the inept activities of Glandelinian officers.

As little girls these child heroines are possessed of extraordinary courage, and an unquenchable thirst for adventure. They constantly find themselves in situations of extreme danger from which they either escape or are rescued. The need to extricate the children from the impossible situations they get themselves into allows scope for the male ego obsessed with rescue fantasies — Darger's situation. However, in a real sense, these little girls seem to have been called into being in order to confront and overcome evil as embodied in adult male form. They are the natural opponents of the wicked Glandelinians and, in particular, of the Manleys, father and two sons, who seek to destroy these dangerous little embodiments of Christian morality.

Some of the attributes of the Vivian girls might seem to suggest masculinity. Their foolhardy courage and addiction to danger, their astonishing skills on horseback and with weapons, their willingness to confront aggression on the battlefield or in enemy camps, their unperturbability when faced with death, or the need to kill their foes, are all characteristics one would traditionally associate with male heroes and, at least in imagination, with little boys. Yet, these children (despite the fact that they possess male genitals) are unmistakably girls. Darger delights in portraying them in writing and pictures as delicate, beautifully dressed, pretty little girls, called into being to withstand the violent and sadistic impulses of murderous male adults (see chapter 11). While he was probably not aware of the revolutionary implications of introducing such strong, independent, and uniquely

capable female characters as the heroines of his writings, he does seem, quite consciously, to have sought to correct a mistaken impression regarding the supposed weakness of little girls.

"I will now speak on behalf of the Vivian Girls, to take away the reproach often given that little girls are usually afraid of things. For as there is always dire of peril in this war, yet they faced it and went through. Yea, to show how much they went through would take a long story. I will say that many boys rejoiced in what they have accomplished. The Vivian Girls therefore are highly favored, and show by these things that they can be and are sharers with us in the very graces of life." "They are something like saints" said Angeline Richee.²⁸

Darger quite obviously loved these creations of his imagination. He takes pride in them, enjoying their spectacular adventures at least as much as his imaginary readers. His wild sense of humor comes into its own in describing these high-spirited, fast-moving, utterly incorrigible and funny children. Not all their adventures are deadly. But for whom were they intended? Who were they calculated to amuse?

At a point well into the story, the Vivian sisters remind their guardian Jack Evans of some of their more hair-raising, and funny, adventures. This brief recapitulation of the past can serve to introduce us to Darger's sense of humor, as well as his astonishing skill as a teller of tall tales.

Once the little girls had been captured and though unsuccessful in attempting to escape twice, they finally succeeded a third time. The little girls themselves told the story which is as follows, having some humor in the experiences;

"The Glandelinians who had made prisoners of us at Phelantonburg Run had ordered us to roll up six rugs, so that the soldiers could take them out, the Glandelinians having been ransacking this house. Looking closely at the rugs we believed that we immediately saw our chance to get away by rolling up the rugs in a way to leave a good sized hollow in the roll, in which each of us could hide. This we did, but the rugs being heavy ones, was increased immensely by the weight of I and my sisters, so that the Glandelinians who were to take the rugs out had all they could do to carry them, with us in, and unfortunately for us, the man carrying the rug I was concealed in, slipped at the head of the stairway and he fell, the rug suddenly unrolled precipitating me down the stairs so violently that, though fortunately I was not hurt, nevertheless the precipitation of my quick flight down the stairs backwards, and every form of rolling, made me see as it seemed a thrillion stars and planits of all colors. I literally went down most of the way head first, and the



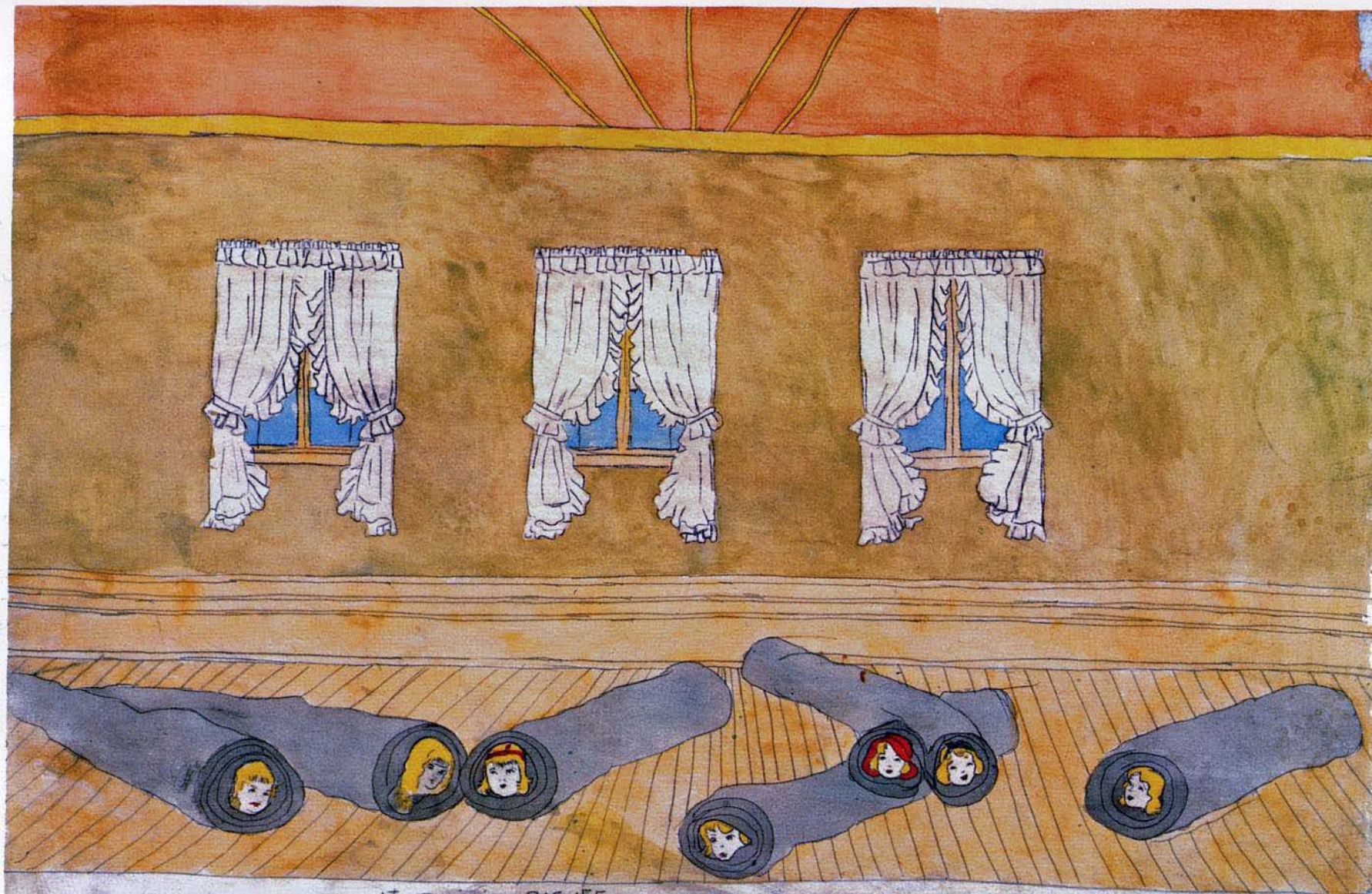
6.1

Henry Darger

Storm's distant approach. Dangerous line squall. (Tropical) The boy and girls are trying to awaken little Vivian girl princess, sound asleep while reclining on rock. Flowering plant with rare orange blossom is called *Castanallia*. Fruit plant similar to

Cantelope when full size. Collage drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, collage elements on paper. 77 x 317 cm. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. Inv. 9444 (verso). ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand.





AT JENNIE RICHEL 2 OF STORY TO EVANS.

THEY ATTEMPT TO GET AWAY BY
ROLLING THEMSELVES IN FLOOR
RUGS.

Glandelinians carrying the other heavier rugs suspected the cause of their great weight, when they saw me go down those steps in such a hurry. And my sisters were at once seized. The officer in the lower room, hearing the commotion caused by my fall rushed out, and seeing me rubbing my head where I was knocked in my fall, said gruffly, 'Trying to escape eh? You little brat. Well you just come down right down to the first floor where we can watch you.'

"I felt very much aggrieved by my bad fall, and the pain in my head, the dizziness and aching all over tending to increase my agony, and his insulting words driving me to anger I retorted, 'Say Colonel Frank Francis, do you think anyone could come down any faster than I did?'

"I and my sisters were brought down into the officers' quarters, and one of the soldiers told of our attempt to escape, and how one of us had been accidentally dumped down the steps by private Henry Darger, who was carrying the rug concealing me. The officers laughed, saying that us little girls would risk anything to get away."

"I guess you would," said Evans gravely, as they were drawing near the christian lines. "Your daring escapes, and attempts to escape, have made my hair raise on end at times. What you little girls dare to do, would make me shiver with fright."

"Well I guess so," said Joice who was telling the story."

It always comes as something of a surprise to discover Private Henry Darger serving in the Glandelinian army, though he tells us himself that he did so for a time. Such intimate involvement on his part with the Vivian girls is nevertheless unusual. Darger obviously enjoys inventing daring schemes of this kind for the children, even when they fail. In the written description of the event, he creates a minor problem, the fact that there are but six rugs to conceal seven Vivian sisters. When he came to depict the scene in a collage-drawing, he was forced to draw a strange double ending to one of the rolled rugs, so as to contain the seventh child (6.2). This is one of the most direct translations from Darger's written text to its graphic equivalent.³⁰ Darger's humor is essentially that of a child. He takes evident pleasure in the hilarious commotion on the staircase, and the "thrillion stars and planits," but in drawing it is the image of seven little girls staring wide-eyed out of the rolled-up rugs that captures his attention:

So fond was Darger of this scene that he also attempted in another collage-drawing to depict the moment of discovery when the rug's contents are revealed (6.3). Unable to draw the complex scene on the stairs, he shows a man stumbling, and the rug unrolled with the little girl on top of it. The label reads: *The blunder of one of the Glandelinian rug carriers causes the others to fall with him, foiling the attempt of the Little Girls none too gently.* This scene is of unique importance, in that we know from the text that the young Glandelinian "rug carrier" depicted is no one else but "Private Henry Darger." This is the only collage-drawing I have been able to identify, thus far, which contains a depiction of one of the Henry Dargers of *The Realms*.

Darger's imagination is essentially pictorial. Even without the accompanying illustration, we can "see" the event very vividly. It is passages like this one, and those that follow, that might incline us to question whether he was writing for his own pleasure or, like Carroll, for the delight of an imaginary child reader. Is some of his childlike nature assumed, rather than innate, utilizing a simple form of humor appropriate to the task of writing for children? The impudent, but mild, exchange between Joice Vivian and the Glandelinian Colonel Frank Francis would obviously appeal to a child reader capable of enjoying the rebellious notion of "talking back."

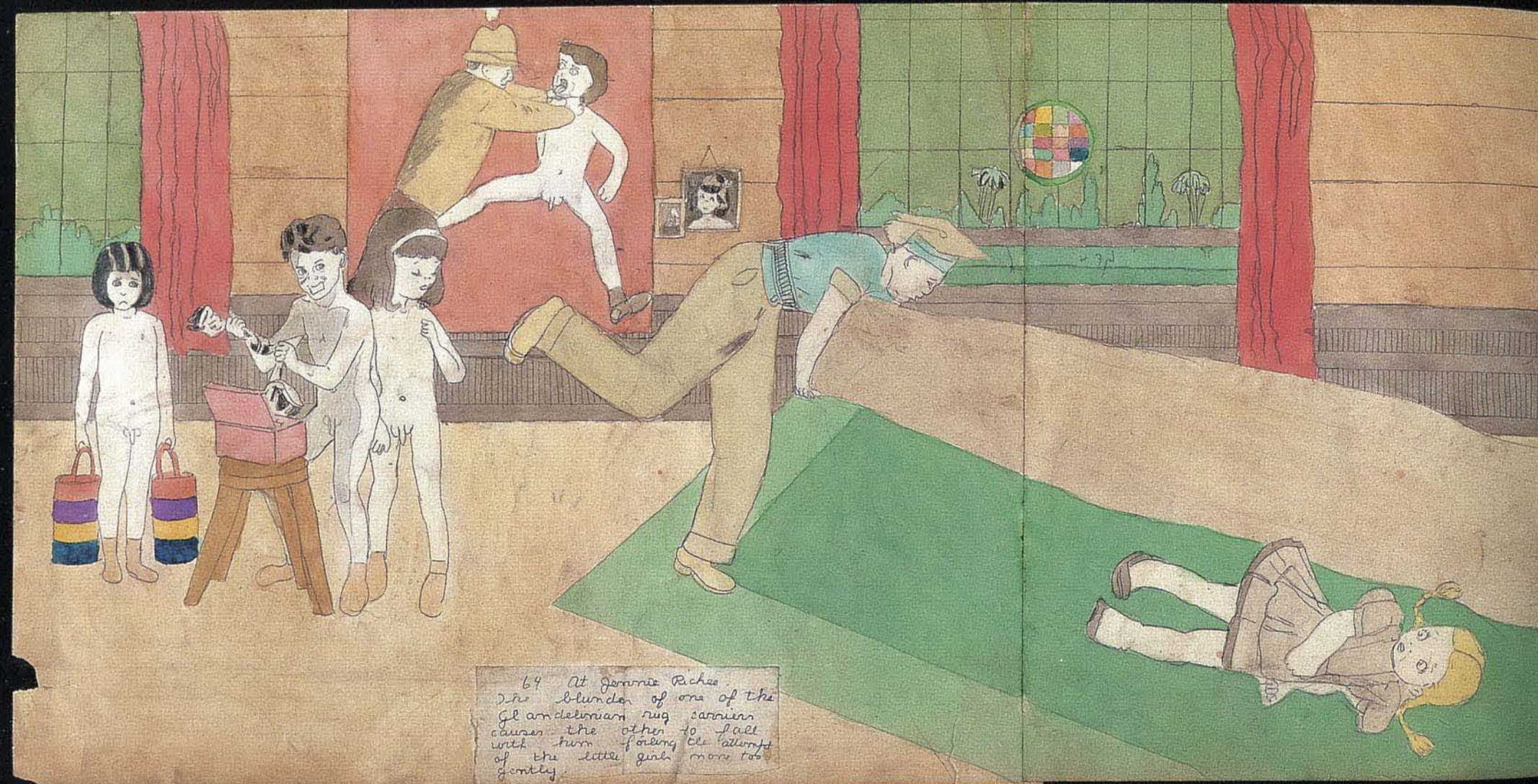
DARGER, and the Vivian girls as well, benefit from the paradoxical fact that events and objects in *The Realms* tend to appear as needed, with explanation provided as an afterthought. This is the case with the Grand Ball held in the Glandelinian headquarters which occurs for no other reason than to provide an opportunity for the appearance of an unusual fiddle case in which the captive children can conceal themselves.

"... to escape openingly out of that house with so many sentries around was suicide, and so the graycoats did not fear of our escaping.

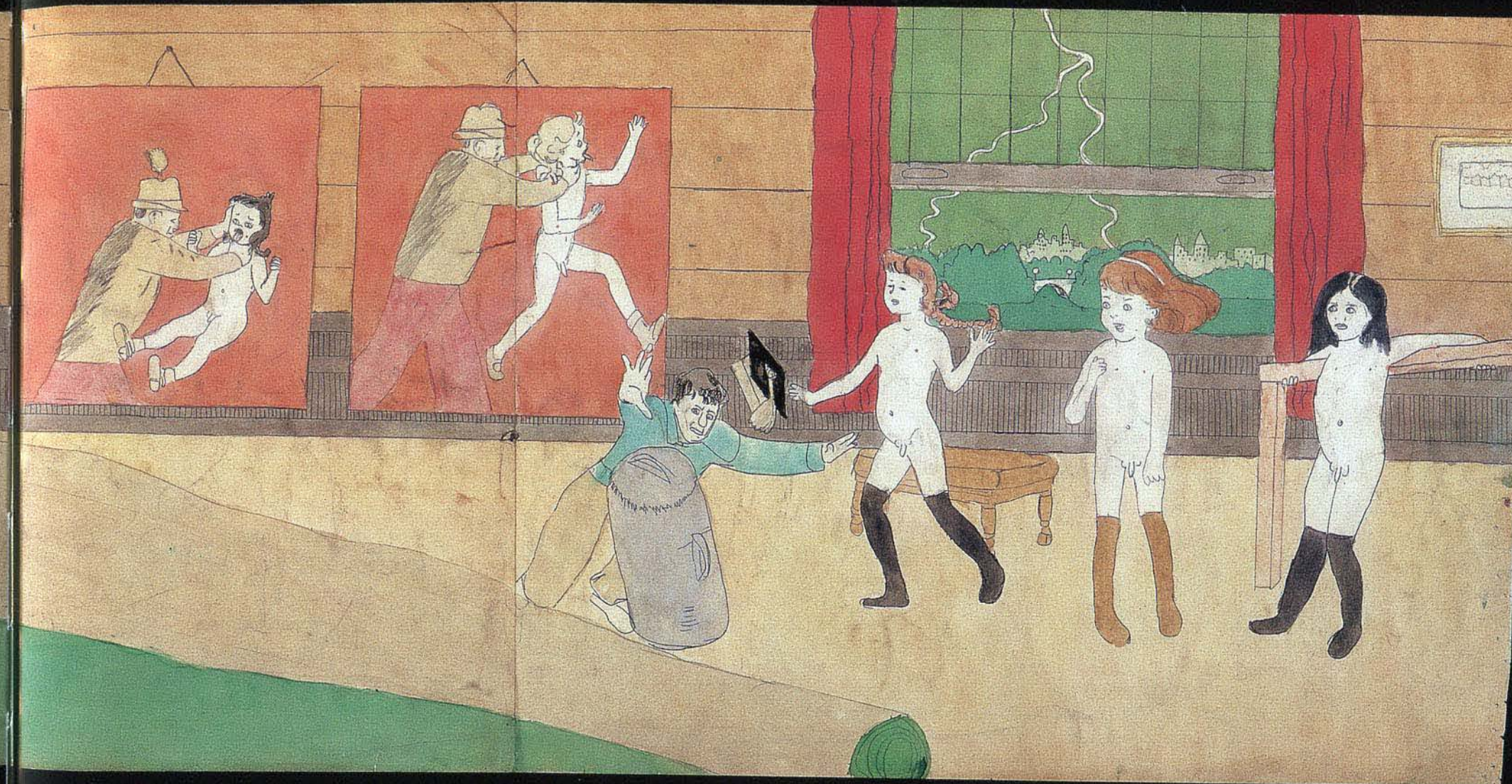
"In the dance hall of the mansion which the Glandelinians had taken possession of, the chief officers had given a grand ball which was in progress."

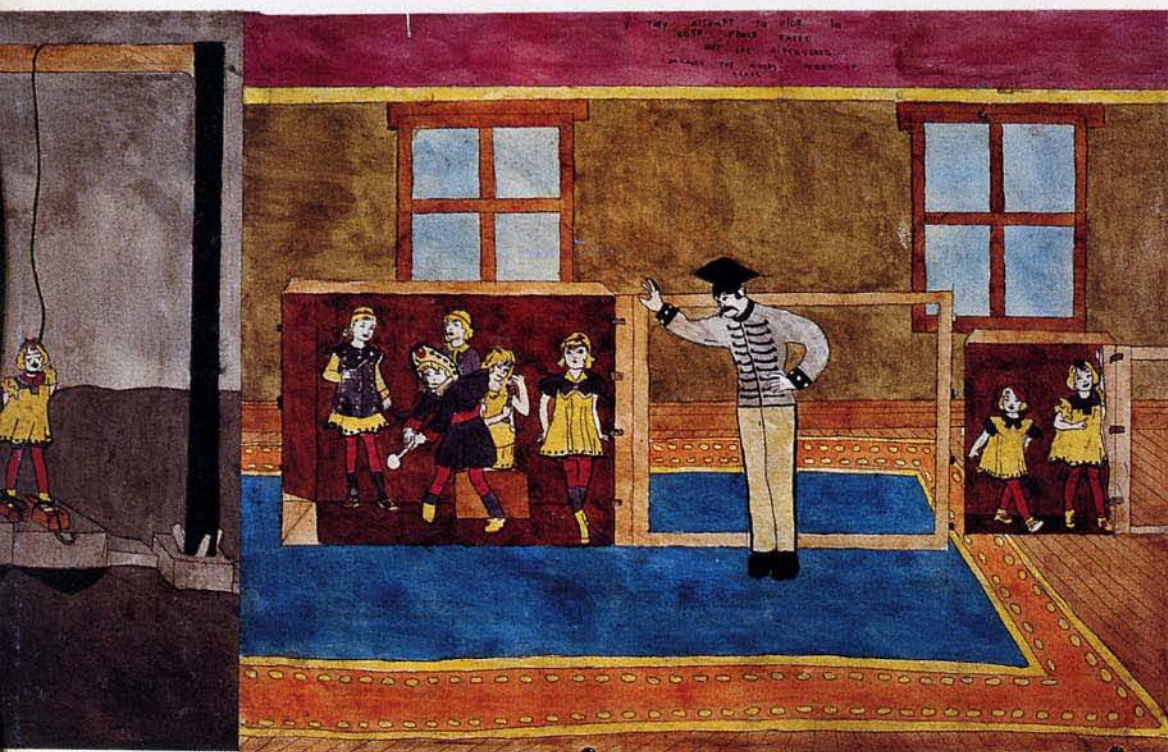
"Did you attend?" asked Evans.

"For a time we joined to allay suspicion of our intentions. Then, going into a room outside of the dance hall, we saw standing there an immense fiddle box on wheels, large enough to conceal six men and still



64 At Jennie Richee
The blunder of one of the
Glandelinian rug carriers
causes the other to fall
with him, foiling the attempt
of the Little Girls none too
gently.





be room enough for the fiddle. At first, seeing the fiddle case and its size, we were amazed, but Violet, poking me vehemently in the side, vehemently said in a whisper, 'That Glandelinian musician must have brought his fiddle in a big dog pound. Anyway, sisters,' she suddenly added, looking at me advisingly, 'The musician must soon be going. Let's hide in here and go with them till we are away from this house and the guards. This may give us an opportunity to escape.'

"We did, bringing the large fiddle in with us, closing the door of the case after us. It became very close in there with us seven so closely packed together, but we did not have long to wait, as the box to our surprise and alarm was being wheeled into the dance hall, we of course not knowing that it was the musician who was going to play that big fiddle. At once, to our dismay, the door of the case was pulled open, and Evans, you couldn't imagine the consternation of the whole throng, when they saw us pulled roughly out and beaten unmercifully by the officers.

"But this second failure did not daunt us."

Darger's visual imagination almost betrays him here. He was so taken by the idea of hiding in a fiddle case that he forgot for a moment that this would be appropriate for only one child, not seven. As a result he was forced in the written text to try to envision "an immense fiddle box on wheels, large enough to conceal six men." He depicts the strangely inappropriate fiddle case in an odd collage-drawing entitled: *They attempt to hide in huge fiddle cases but are discovered because the*

6.4

Henry Darger

They attempt to hide in huge fiddle cases but are discovered because the doors were of glass.

Collage-drawing.

Right panel of a three panel composition.

19 x 70 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.

doors were of glass (6.4). As illustrator he seems to have been confronted with another difficulty, that of depicting the discovery of the children in the closed cases. The solution arrived at, transparent doors, which would reveal rather than conceal the children inside, is still more perplexing. Small wonder this ruse didn't succeed. When he came to depict the same scene in a second collage-drawing, he reverted to his original idea, of cases shaped like bass violins (6.5).

AS WITH CARROLL, Darger's imagination ran riot, tending to find expression in truly irrational invention. Their wild fantasies and delight in childlike fun led them both to depart quite radically from the demands of logic or reality, with wonderful results. One of Darger's funniest scenes occurs when the children substitute inflated rubber beach toys, in the form of horses, for the steeds of the Glandelinian officers. He depicted this scene both in his text and in a later picture.

"In a barn nearby was a score of rubber horses, which we discovered, and quickly drew out, putting them in the place of the real ones, saddling them and then, mounted seven ponies and campered away with the sixty horses belonging to the Glandelinians.

"Our escape was discovered, and at once there was a hue and cry, the nearest Glandelinians quickly jumping on the rubber horses. The weight of the soldiers at once flattened out the horses, making the soldiers go down with a resounding jolt, suddenly to spring up again, throwing the men off head first.

"One of the men in a rage, threw his musket at the horse that threw him,

thinking it was the real one, with the remark, 'Any measly pony that get's fresh mit an old bird like I'm, had got another dod-gasted guess, savvy?' When the gun rebounded back, striking the man so violently in the face as to make him see a thrillion number of stars, and knock him down flat on his back."³¹

This scene, which might not evoke much response in the overly rational mind of an adult reader, would inspire absolute delight in a child familiar with the plump forms of an inflated beach toy mounted by an adult.

Darger, like Carroll, took particular pleasure in uncomfortable confrontations between people and animals. Children, being closer to small animals, handle such bizarre encounters with ease, while adults may respond to them with terror and confusion.

"We were immediately put into a rat infested cell, but instead of being afraid of the rats or mice, we managed to capture ten of the biggest rats, and over fourty mice, and placed them into a large box found in the cell.

"The next morning we managed to work our way out of the cell, taking the box with us, and turned them loose among the Glandelinians sitting around the big tables eating their breakfast, and causing such confusion that it even drew inside the guards, and in the panic we succeeded in getting out of the house, jumping on the nearest horses, untying the rest, and getting away with a hundred horses, before the Glandelinians had time to pursue us with success.

"A furious chase was started and, finally surrounded, we hid the horses in a secure portion of a field, and remained hiding under a bridge, and finally escaped by pretending that we had been caught in quicksands by having our hats and other loose material on sand of such real character near our hiding place. We had escaped other traps during this pursuit by tricks more clever than those already described."³²

In staging the successful escape of the Vivian girls from their prison, Darger refutes the notion that little girls are afraid of rats and mice. Meanwhile, his marvelous illustration of this scene carries the humor still further by depicting the terrified Glandelinian generals attempting to escape from the tiny rodents by climbing on top of the tables (6.6). Darger's comment: "Some soldiers!"



6.5

Henry Darger

66 At Jennie Richee. They attempt to hide in fiddle cases of huge size. Collage-drawing. 19 x 70 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

66 At Jennie Richee
They attempt to hide
in fiddle cases of huge
size.

To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern. Are helped out of cave trap by Blengiglomenian creatures. [center] Persued by forest fires, proving the bigness of the conflagration. It is 40 miles away and advancing fast. Cloud of storm [at left]; How when they were put in a rat infested cell, they by using the rats and even a few mice they caught, they managed to escape after being persued and hounded. These Glandelinians were afraid of rats and mice. Some soldiers! [at right]. Three panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 19 x 70 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



AS A FINAL DEMONSTRATION of Darger's unique ability as a comic writer for children, I want to examine the slightly longer account of the conflict between "Sadie, the stork" and a hapless Glandelinian general blackmailed into submission by the Vivian girls.

"... we were lost in a wilderness, and after being fugitives of the Glandelinians for about two weeks steadily, we were finally drawing near a new Glandelinian camp along the McHollester Run river, and saw what we realized to be a Glandelinian officer in tights, swimming under a tree, whose branches stretched across the wide stream. Winking to Violet, who had a long rope and a long stick, I said, 'Maybe we can force him to write for us a pass through the enemy's lines as he is a general.' I and Violet climbed up the tree, my other sisters doing so too to keep out of sight, I and Violet clambering onto the long branch which he was directly underneath, and began our prank.

"Near the officer was a large stork looking for fish, and as the officer drew nearer, declaring to himself, half aloud, 'Wherever Violet and her sisters ain't, there is always peace, ding-bust it.'

"Violet made a noose at one end of the rope, and lassoed his foot drawing it tightly around his angle. The motion of our operations swayed the branch so menacingly that a smaller portion struck the bird a resounding whack on the hind quarters, and thinking the man in the water was the offender, caught his nose in his bill giving it a sharp bite and tweek.

"Oh, Sister, Look I got a bite.' cried Violet to me with a laugh.

"Maybe it's a sea ox or a walrus' I answered as Violet produced a small tablet of writing paper and a pencil, and extending them downward toward her prisoner, 'Good morning, dear general,' she said. 'Would you mind writing a pass for us through the lines? And just say that we could have general Hindlass's auto for six hours or so, and charge it.' At that moment I heard my sisters giggling.

"Never! While I live no Hyenas could bulldoze an old horse like I'm,' roared the Glandelinian general. 'You christian dogs that think you can get fresh mit me couldn't [word missing]. HELP. HELP. HELP. HELP,' he yelled, but we were not daunted as he knew the Glandelinians could not even hear a shot at that distance from his camp."

"Lucky they couldn't hear a shot at that distance." thought Jack Evans to himself.

"Well, I at once drew tight on the rope, pulling the Glandelinian officer forward, drawing him completely under, between the legs of the bird, who gave a pugnacious look. 'Talk to him, Birdie dear.' laughed my sister Violet. 'Maybe he will listen to reason from a lady. We are not ladies. We are hyenas as he says.'

"This is Sadie, general.' I said. 'Maybe she will give you the next dance.'

"Oh, Sadie, what a flirt,' cried my sister Violet, as the bird put her foot violently into his face almost forcing it under the water. 'She loves him at first sight.' I said. 'Maybe he will write the pass for us, or we will love him, and do.'

"I WRITE IT CHASS' growled the Glandelinian general, grabbing the paper and pencil as Violet tickled the heel of his foot, saying, 'Kitchy, kootchy, kitchy, koochy, kitchy, kitchy, koochy.'

"BUT THE TIME WILL COME FOR THE DING-BUSTED WORM TO TURN AROUND ON IT. I'LL STAND NO NON-SENSE FROM YOU DING-BUSTED CENTIPEDES IN HUMAN FORM.

"And don't forget about the auto' I said in answer. 'And you should spell auto with a capital "AUT"' When the man finished writing, the paper and pencil was rapidly drawn up by Violet.

"Ha.' we heard the Glandelinian officer cry as he started to swim for the other shore. 'Now watch me swim for the camp, and tell them it is nix on the note. Haw!'

"But we were not through with him yet. 'Why, General,' cried Violet. 'Are you going to go away and leave poor Sadie?'

"Ah, men have not got any hearts now-a-days, eh, Sadie?' I asked, placing another noose around the body of the bird. As the noose drew tight, the man by the sudden stop, sprawled in the water.

"Aw —R—R—R——K.' came from the bird.

"Hey, General, Sadie is calling you.' cried Violet.

"Don't cry, Sadie,' I said, 'He will come back.'

"The bird, alarmed by the tugging of the rope, started off into the air, and by the time we were down from the tree and started away, the bird had dragged the Glandelinian officer a considerable distance

from the tree, out of the water, and toward the land. He had to cling to the neck of a cow toward which he was dragged before he managed to bring the bird down and unfasten the noose around his angle. We knew that he was as angry as a tormented bull, and we reached the camp before he came to report his experience."³³

This is one of very few adventures in *The Realms* in which an almost naked adult is caught in a compromising and vaguely sexual situation, though Darger is careful to mention that the unnamed general is wearing swimming trunks. With the Vivian girls operating from a tree, the phallic bird, Sadie, who they almost seem to know, provides a means of aggressive attack on the vulnerable adult male, suspended upside down in the air by his foot. Still greater intimacy and helplessness is suggested by the little girls' decision to tickle the general into submission, a form of sexual activity readily familiar to children. Darger's marvelous dramatic sense is revealed by the dialogue between the remarkably restrained children, and the bombastic but totally ineffectual officer. Once the pass is signed, reason is completely abandoned, as the amazed general, now attached to the stork, and "angry as a tormented bull," is carried off through the air to be rescued by a cow to whom he clings in desperation. This truly cinematic narrative, designed for the child reader, conforms admirably to the irrational playfulness and veiled sexual innuendo of Carroll's finest nonsense.

6.7

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee.

They had seized a Glandelinian officer who had been in swimming, and though he is half naked, they had forced him to sign a pass through the foe lines, and tied him to a tree so he could not raise the alarm.

Collage-drawing.

Left panel of a three-panel composition.

19 x 70 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.





When Darger came to illustrate this scene, he chose to invent a new ending, which provided a more overt means for humiliating the general, and a more realistic method of successful escape for the children (6.7). The label reads: *They had seized a Glandelinian officer who had been in swimming, and though he is half naked they had forced him to sign a pass through the foe lines, and tied him to a tree so he could not raise the alarm — At Jennie Richee.*

This series of comic incidents obviously pleased Darger enough that he summarized them, with remarkable skill, in what seems to be an abridged version of earlier events, narrated for Jack Evans. No incident in *The Realms* is the subject of so many separate illustrations. Few scenes in the vast story that is *The Realms* reveal as successfully as these both Darger's skill as a writer of narrative, and his genius in the pictorial rendering of simple dramatic events. An elaborate collage-drawing provides a dramatic nighttime setting for the telling of these exciting stories, with the Vivian girls, Jack Evans, and various other spectators gathered together in an elaborate and elegant interior (6.8).

6.8 left

Henry Darger

Tells Gen. Evans of Experiences, See following experiences. Collage-drawing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

6.9 right

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Have thrilling time running through a field of gutted bodies of children with shells bursting all around. Vivian girls wear purple rimmed hats. Others are girl scouts. Collage-drawing. Right panel of a three-panel composition. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



PLAYFUL AND HAPPY adventures such as those we have been examining occur infrequently in *The Realms*. They surface, from time to time, as comic interludes amidst a sea of dark and troubling events. More typically, the children's lives are overwhelmed by the unrelieved tension and anxiety of war, natural disasters, and the perverse violence of adults. Soon we will see these children caught in floods and forest fires, fleeing across battlefields and from explosions, stumbling over the bodies of the dead and dying [6.9]. Child slaves and even the Vivian girls will be exposed to torture, mutilation, and murder. Adventure then becomes a deadly serious matter. Although Darger may have intended at some point to write an adventure story for children, he had little sense of what would be acceptable for the child reader. More precisely, he himself was constantly being overwhelmed by internal experiences of tension and anxiety, and troubled by the perverse violence of an adult mind. Much of the time he appears to have been emotionally a child plagued by the confusing fantasies of an adult. As a result, he was constantly slipping off the edge of the acceptable into realms far more real than he wished to acknowledge.

Fantasy as Fiction: Fiction as Fantasy

The most beautiful things are those that madness prompts and reason writes. Essential to remain between the two, close to madness when you dream and close to reason when you write.

—André Gide³⁴

At this point it might be helpful to remind ourselves that we are examining, not a simple internal fantasy, but a typewritten, partially bound manuscript; an uncontrollably huge novel, or a compulsively detailed work of fictional history. What led Darger to commit these products of his imagination to paper? For whom was he writing? To what extent can this body of writing be described as fantasy? Are once internal images changed fundamentally by being written down? Is true fantasy possible in the presence of an audience, even if, as in this case, the audience is imaginary? Comparison of the creative processes of our two writers of fantasy, Henry Darger and Lewis Carroll, may help us to deepen our understanding of these issues.

The birth of the story now known as *Alice in Wonderland* provides an unusually clear instance of the workings of the creative process, characterized by a far from obvious demarcation separating pure fantasy from a work of fiction. The story was first told on a summer's day in 1862, when Charles Dodgson and his college friend Robinson Duckworth were rowing a boat, with three little girls in it, on the Thames near Oxford. Ten-year-old Alice Liddell was sitting in the bow, and the story was told for and about her. It is perhaps significant that although Dodgson was facing Alice, Duckworth

was seated between them, so that Dodgson could only see her occasionally. At one point Duckworth interrupted the story to ask Charles if he was making it up on the spot. He replied, "Yes, I'm inventing as we go along."³⁵

What is evident is that Charles Dodgson, on this magical outing with his beloved Alice, was possessed: Lewis Carroll had clearly taken over and an elaborate fantasy was emerging from the depths of his mind. This sudden emergence of the powerful persona Lewis Carroll was invariably triggered by the presence, or the memory image, of a little girl. He was inventing a story for Alice, but in a real sense he was telling it for himself, the strange images emerging at the prompting of inner necessity. It is apparent that the real Alice Liddell was only minimally present in his mind. Another, internal Alice had taken over, it was she who toppled down the rabbit hole and set off on a series of fantastic adventures.³⁶

Dominated by a peculiar, vaguely childlike mental state, unmistakably erotic in feeling, and protected by the knowledge that this oral narrative would vanish like a dream with the day, Carroll allowed his fantasies almost free reign. What took shape on this magical day was almost a true dream, rich in unconscious imagery, and engendered by powerful unconscious drives modified only by Carroll's more or less accurate awareness of what was appropriate for little girls. Carefully veiled, his fantasy nevertheless embodied an astonishing range of infantile sexual and aggressive impulses and wishes.

HAD ALICE LIDDELL not asked her friend to write his story down for her, this product of a "golden afternoon" would certainly have vanished. Even then, it is important to realize that the written version of the story, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, first took shape exclusively in the form of a unique manuscript, handwritten and illustrated by Carroll himself, thus paralleling the single copy that Darger's work survives in. The task of writing down what had originated as an oral event, making the transition from almost pure fantasy to a written text, must have involved changes. Carroll spoke of the nature of this process.

*In writing it out, I added many fresh ideas, which seemed to grow of themselves upon the original stock; and many more added themselves when, years afterwards, I wrote it all over again for publication; but ... every such idea, and nearly every word of dialogue, came of itself.*³⁷

During the period when he was writing out the story for her Carroll saw little of the real Alice Liddell. She continued to exist for him more as a figure of fantasy and memory than as a real person. For the little girl in his mind, he created a unique present, a permanent memento of a story told on a vanished day in July, for a real little girl who was soon to vanish into adulthood. It is this handwritten and drawn manuscript that is most meaningfully compared with Darger's writings.³⁸

WE KNOW of no similar creative incidents in Darger's life. It is not impossible that when he was living in the Lincoln Asylum he invented stories for the other children. But, if *The Realms* first came into being in oral form before a real audience, no trace of such an origin is reflected in the manuscript. More likely he told the stories to himself. All that can be said with any degree of accuracy is that a fantasy version of *The Realms* may have pre-existed the early volumes, in that Darger seems to have been familiar with the main outlines and characters of his story before he set to work to write it down sometime around 1911.

From the beginning, one senses that he had an imaginary audience in mind. At least some of the time that imaginary audience appears to have consisted of little girls. The Vivian girls and their friends seem to have been invented, not only as the heroines of his story, but as his imaginary audience as well. At least in part, *The Realms* was intended to appeal to little girls, and just occasionally it might.³⁹ The intimacy of Carroll's afternoon in a boat with Alice and her sisters is, in a real sense, paralleled by the endless nights Darger spent in his room, surrounded by pictures of his imaginary little girlfriends, recounting his, and their, adventures in the Realms of the Unreal. Darger was never alone in his room. His writing is unmistakably a form of communication, with imaginary children his ideal audience. He knew they were listening.

He Must Have Been a Very Odd Man

There is a truly extraordinary moment in the first volume of *The Realms* when Darger imagines Jack Evans and the Vivian girls looking at his collection of pictures of little girls, and at his huge manuscript volumes of *The Realms*. It seems the children have found Darger's possessions; it is as if he wanted them to have them. In this enormously revealing passage, with its multiple layers of reality, he imagines their reaction.

Soon they had them on the table. Evans proceeded to examine them. He took the pictures first. These he examined carefully. "Why this is very extraordinary," he exclaimed. "Every picture seems to look you straight in the face, as if you had some secret to tell them, or as if you suspected them of knowing your thoughts. And probably he had to use them as company as he was childless."

"Maybe that is so, and he wanted them all to look as if they were paying attention to him" said Jennie. "He must have been a very odd man."⁴⁰

The children, and their guardian Jack Evans (Darger's alter ego), now turn to the huge volumes containing the history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war.

"He certainly did make a good history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war ... He has every battle in their correct places, and he predicts that he served in them all, and an account of everything you little girls went through and even of my many experiences and rescues."⁴¹

The Vivian girls have found their own story, an accurate account of all their adventures, in a pile of manuscripts written by someone unknown to them, but who evidently knows them very well. At first they can't imagine who this odd person might be. But then, examining the books more carefully, Evans discovers a signature, and they learn who the author is.

"Here's his full signature, address and everything, little girls." They all at once crowded around him to see, and sure enough this is what they read.

History of the Glandco-Abbieannian War
Written by Henry Joseph Darger
St. Joseph's Hospital, 2100 Burling'st
740 Garfield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

In this complex fantasy, the Vivian girls become Darger's first readers. In a real sense, staring down at Henry from the walls of his room, they had been his readers from the beginning — listening to the story as it unfolded, hearing his secrets, reading his thoughts.

Self-Revelation and Disguise

At some point in the process of writing out his story for Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll conceived the idea of publishing it as a book for children.⁴² Over the course of several years he adapted the story for a wider audience, changing the title, and massively revising and extending the original.⁴³ In the process, his once spontaneous fantasies were transformed into true fiction; what had originated in a situation of intimacy had become a book. Carroll's/Dodgson's firmer grip on reality enabled him both to find a publisher and, at the same time, to adapt his story to an ideal audience of children.

Lacking the English author's social skills and connections, as well as his slightly more solid understanding of the world, Darger, as far as we know, never attempted to find a publisher, nor would he have grasped the necessity of modifying his work in any way to suit an audience. As we have seen, he did have vague fantasies of having his work published by General Hanson Vivian, but these dreams of fame and fortune remained entirely confined to the *Realms of the Unreal*. Much of the power of *The Realms* derives from its failure to conform to the conventions of children's literature, or indeed to any other literary category. For Darger, the move from internal fantasy to a typewritten story for an imaginary audience involved little or no modification. He seldom betrays anything resembling a really accurate sense of what might be acceptable to a reader, child or adult. Certainly, occasional sections of his text, and more than a few of his illustrations, seem to have been conceived for an audience of children. We know that he went on reading children's story books

throughout his adult life, and no doubt he understood at some level what would be needed in writing for a child reader, but he just couldn't hold these requirements in mind. Indeed, he often appears to be traveling in precisely the opposite direction. Far from adapting his fantasies for children, his daydreams can suddenly be directed against them. Children then become the objects of his terrible rage and destructiveness, with explosions of overt violence and perversion of a kind never seen in Carroll. Evidently, the forces within were too strong. Again and again, the narrative was overwhelmed by a tide of darkness, as Darger yielded to fantasy he could not control.

Ultimately, his only audience was himself. He was "Henry Jos. Darger. Author of written manuscript," but he was also the Vivian girls, the Christian forces, the Blengiglomenean serpents, the Glandelinians, and numerous other characters in his book. He wrote the book in his room and there it remained, his fantasies safely buried in the *Realms of the Unreal*. As a result, a written text has seldom come so close to being pure — unmodified and uncensored — fantasy. Rarely, if ever, has the mind of a man found such complete embodiment in words.

In thrusting Alice down an all but bottomless rabbit hole, Carroll introduces an essential preparatory element of much sexual fantasy: the necessity of removing its object from the world, to an imaginary space where manmade and even natural laws no longer hold, and where normal restrictions and protections are not present. This is certainly Alice's experience when, cut off from her family, disoriented and confused, she becomes the passive victim of whatever happens. Not surprisingly, what happens focuses almost at once on her body. In *the Realms of the Unreal* war and natural upheaval on a massive scale cause a similar disruption in normal circumstances, with children in particular rendered vulnerable to assaults of all kinds.

Once the scene is set, the specific direction taken by sexual and sadistic fantasy depends on the individual. The fantasies of our two authors, even though their sexual object is a little girl, differ considerably: Carroll displays compulsive voyeurism and an obsession with eating and being eaten. Darger's ultimate interest focuses on strangulation and brutal attacks on the interior of the body. They are similar, however, in their inability to recognize or acknowledge these perverse drives as their own, with the result that they tend to operate to a greater or lesser extent through images and symbols which conceal the true nature of their desires. Alternatively, both project overt unacceptable impulses and feelings onto others.

An example of this process in a more restrained form is seen in Alice's frightening experience of drinking from a bottle, or eating foods, which causes her body to shrink to a humiliatingly miniature size, or to grow suddenly to enormous and unwieldy proportions, in emulation of an active penis. Her body parts reveal a similar tendency to expand or contract, her neck on one occasion becoming so elongated that she is mistaken for a snake.

She was a good deal frightened by this very sudden change ... Then she tried to bring her head down to her hands, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in every direction, like a serpent. She had just succeeded in bending it down in a beautiful zig-zag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be the tops of the trees of the wood she had been wandering in, when a sharp hiss made her draw back: a large pigeon had flown into her face, and was violently beating her with its wings.

"Serpent!" screamed the pigeon. "I'm not a serpent!" said Alice indignantly, "Let me alone!"⁴⁴

Darger's naive, but more obviously undisguised, embodiment of similar bodily experiences and concerns is seen in the fact that all little girls in *The Realms* possess male genitals.

Carroll's characters, like Darger's, lack much in the way of personality, revealing a somewhat schizoid inability to relate to each other with real warmth or responsibility. Both authors conceive of little girls as tough and outspoken, and resilient in the face of danger. In the underground or looking-glass world real violence is only hinted at, and generally avoided. Alice's insensitivity in introducing the topic of a bird-eating cat in a company consisting largely of birds and mice can provide an illustration.

"Please come back and finish your story!" Alice called after it, and the others all joined in chorus "Yes, please do!" but the mouse only shook its ears, and walked quickly away, and was soon out of sight ...

"I wish I had our Dinah here, I know I do!" said Alice aloud, addressing no one in particular, "she'd soon fetch it back!"

"And who is Dinah, if I might venture to ask the question?" said the Lory.

Alice replied eagerly, for she was always ready to talk about her pet, "Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice, you can't think! And oh! I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!"

This answer caused a remarkable sensation among the party; some of birds hurried off at once; one old magpie began wrapping itself up very carefully, remarking "I really must be getting home: the night air does not suit my throat," and a canary called out in a trembling voice to its children "come away from her, my dears, she's no fit company for you!" On various pretexts, they all moved off, and Alice was soon left alone.⁴⁵

Despite Carroll's relative restraint and carefully veiled aggression, the appropriateness of his writings for children has often been questioned, particularly as our increased sensitivity to psychological issues has made his symbolism ever more transparent.⁴⁶ Unquestionably, there were occasions when, like Darger, he seems to have lost control, and written letters to children that were less than funny.

My DEAR Enid,

So you think you've got the courage to come a walk by yourself with me? Well, I shall come for you on April 31, at 13 o'clock, and first I will take you to the Oxford Zoological Gardens, and put you into a cage of LIONS, and when they've had a good feed, I'll put whatever is left of you into a cage of TIGERS. Then I'll bring you to my rooms, and give a regular beating, with a thick stick, to my new little friend. Then I'll put you into the coal-hole and feed you for a week on nothing but bread and water. Then I'll send you home in a milk-cart, in one of the empty milk-cans. And after that, if ever I come for you again, you'll scream louder than a COCKATOO!

Your Loving friend,

Lewis Carroll⁴⁷

The adventures Darger arranges for his little girls generally reveal far more obviously the real nature of his drives, which frequently emerge undisguised, though invariably projected onto others. As we move from Carroll to Darger, the temperature inevitably rises; playfulness is replaced by compulsion, irrational nonsense turns into violence, and stark terror is unleashed, even when, as here, murder is avoided.

Hands of Fire

"MAYBE the mystery is inside the secret room," said Angeline. "let's get some men with axes and have a door cut in it, so we can go in and see." This was decided upon. They ordered six men to cut a door hastily and when this was done the little girls went in, finding the room in total darkness. Violet and her sisters lighted some candles they found in the other room, and examined the place which proved to be a vault for piles of money were still there in many lockers. Violet hinted upon an idea.

"I have an intention to sleep in here just for one night, and for fun," she said to her sisters. "To stay here and count all that money and give it for the cause. Who is game?"

"We will all sleep in here," answered Joice. "None of us are afraid." So it was decided. The hole was hewed large enough to emit the beds, which before night time were brought in.

"If this occurrence is really true, then I'll claim that the Aronburg murder has something to do with it," said Angeline that night.

"Bet it was the devil's hand," said Violet seriously. "You know that Hanson said that the hand threw a terrible supernatural heat and was red in color."

If it is we will shoot it," said Joice, "The devil will not show his dirty hand to us." Violet and her sisters carefully laid their pistols under the pillow where they could easily reach them and laid still for some time. Then Jennie broke the stillness by crying just as the redness appeared:

"GRACIOUS GIRLS, LOOK YOUNDER QUICK."

With an impulse her sisters looked in the indicated direction and saw that their exit seemed to be closed like magic, while two red hands the very height and width of the walls, throwing a singing heat that

scorched the very air, traveled slowly up and down the two side walls, and then were gone leaving everything in a seemingly supernatural darkness. Though not apparently frightened they were nevertheless excited from what they had seen. The hole in the wall had not really been closed as they thought, the redness having made it seem so dark there that it had seemed so. Finding the exit there they were relieved for had it really happened they would have died of suffocation for the vault had been air tight before the hole had been cut in.

"My but that was a terrible sight," said Jennie. "Two big red hands at once and such heat. I felt as if I was facing some mighty furnace."

"Let's make some lights and examine the walls those hands traveled on," said Violet. The candles were lit and they proceeded to work in their nighties at that.

"The walls seem mighty hot" said Catherine. "Maybe those hands were of fire."

"It seems so," said Violet. "I know one thing," she added, "There is an attic above this vault. Let's make an investigation there. We can get there by one of the rooms."

This seemed to be a good idea. For the sake of precaution however they took their guns with them. When they reached the attic they lit several gas jets they saw hanging from the ceiling and got a full view of the attic. Against one of the walls of the attic to their surprise a hedious scene was exposed. Two red hands seemed to clutch at them, especially at their throats, and threw a fiercer heat than ever where there was a strange roaring noise from them. Now the strange mysterious hands would not disappear, but got bigger and bigger until it cut off their escape from the trap door. Horrified, the little girls drew back and aiming their pistols fired simultaneously. Then to their surprise the hands were gone, but the gas lights went out mysteriously, and they were in total darkness, while a strange, horrible odor filled the room⁴⁸ [6.10].

Spying on the Enemy: Examining Little Girls

"Do you realize the peril that you risk in spying on those Glandelinians, whose fury toward spies would terrify the very demons of hell if they themselves were caught spying?" "We do," answered Violet. "We fear not and defy them."⁴⁹

The chief military activity of the Vivian girls, and of their armies of girl and boy scouts, is spying on the enemy. This dangerous sport provides the children with an opportunity for wild adventure and madcap humor, while offering Darger an occasion for writing scenes suitable for a child reader. Based to some extent on his own reading of adventure stories for children, these narratives also possess a quality of naiveté which might suggest an origin in his own childhood fantasies.⁵⁰ Darger's sense of fun, and his skill as a comic writer, appear in his accounts of children's acts of concealed aggression against helpless and stupid adults, reminding us of situations in which as a child in institutions he surreptitiously observed the activities of adults with a perceptive and critical eye. Combined with his later illustrations of such scenes, which have an almost identical flavor of childish naiveté about them, these stories still possess a quality that might appeal to a child reader.

In volume one, an event takes place which brings Darger and the Vivian girls together in a scene suggestive of considerable intimacy. It comes about because of the children's desire to be allowed to become spies. Their uncle, General Hanson, is speaking:

"You little girls wish to spy on the enemy do you?" he said seriously. "Why you are only children. How can you do it? And don't you realize the terrible consequences that will befall you children if you are caught? ... You run a great chance of death. I'm the main commander, but I can not allow you little girls to do this without your father's consent."⁵¹

General Robert Vivian is consulted:

He decided that the best means was to have the Vivian girls examined first. They must prove to be about as able to do the work as the great Gemini spies, or otherwise he would not let them proceed on the dangerous missions.

Who else can be called on to conduct a suitably rigorous examination of the children but the Supreme Person of the Gemini, Henry Darger, and his men? It seems that Darger doesn't yet know the Vivian sisters very well, but thoughts of examining little girls unleash a host of deeply subjective responses in him. He arranges to conduct the interview in the privacy of a chamber strikingly like his room in Chicago. The lights are extinguished, candles lit, and the scene that unfolds is familiar to us as a midnight meeting of the Gemini.

The Gemini were shown to a large dark room with a table of a large round shape with chairs around it formerly used by other Gemini spies. These were occupied by the Vivian girls who were brought in, while the leader of the Gemini sat in one of the chairs before the middle of the table. Several candles were lighted, and then after the Gemini took their own seats, the leader stood up and said;

"You little girls are requested to write your names down very plainly on this sheet of paper." Violet and her sisters did so, showing indeed to the surprised Gemini leader that they had a good hand at writing. He then signed his own name underneath, and then from a roll of parchment took a long black envelope with the Black head of the Gemini engraved upon it, and then opening it, requested Violet to draw out the contents. She did so by drawing out a long yellow sheet of paper.

"That is your destiny," said Darger. "You are requested to answer all my questions." ...

A dry smile concealed by the hood spread over the Gemini general's face. "I suppose you do not know me," he said.

"Yes, I do," answered Violet. "You came on a mission to our own home in Abbieannia for us, and done a lot for us. You are Henry Darger, the Supreme Person of the Catholic Gemini Spies."

"You are right, my little girl," answered the general.

Having recognized Gemini Darger, despite the fact that he is veiled from head to toe in the peculiar garb of the Black Brothers, Violet and her sisters are now presented with a series of tests designed to evaluate their abilities as spies. These ordeals are curiously reminiscent of the methods adapted by little boys' clubs in admitting new members, and may, in part, reflect the rituals of the Chicago, or Lincoln, branch of the Gemini. One test in particular recalls the mysteries of childhood.

He produced a large bottle, which had the word label on it, and which was written DEADLY GERMS BE CAREFUL. Underneath was a skull and cross bones. In reality in the bottle was only the finest jelly that could ever be made. "If you little girls are really brave, you will dare to open that bottle," said the Gemini. "I have here a disinfectant so that nothing will result."

Violet and her sisters looked at the bottle, and then Violet said laughing, "You must think we are geese to be fooled like that. Don't you think we can't tell the difference between the jelly made by germs, and the original kind? Why, in that bottle is the purest jelly that could ever be produced. It's grape jelly mixed with a sort of dark honey. Here sisters, help yourselves to it, he won't mind."

He pretended to act frenzied, and all the members pretended to be panic stricken as the little girls opened the bottle, but Violet only cried, "It's nothing, what are you men afraid of?" and they proceeded to eat some of the pure jelly.

Almost invariably, when such rituals are enacted in boys' clubs, sex rears its head and the tests take a turn toward the erotic. In Darger's case this assumes a symbolic form as the little girls are confronted with snakes.

There was a few minutes of silence, and then the Gemini leader decided to test their nerve. He produced a large basket, and said; "Supposing I had you little girls a prisoner here, but that nevertheless the door was left open, and if I let out of this basket a live viper. What would you little girls do? Run?"

"If you have a live one in that basket, you will be sorry if you let him out," answered Violet. "We are quicker with our guns than a snake is at striking. We do not know what it is to fear a snake yet."

"We'll see," he answered, and dumped suddenly on the table a small garden snake. He had evidently expected to see Violet and her sisters jump out of their chairs and run from the room, but they all forgot themselves, and tried to see who could get possession of the little snake first.

"Well, I'll be." exclaimed the Gemini leader. "You little girls are as brave as anyone could be ..."

The various ordeals which follow all bear the stamp of adolescent sexual fantasy, as the brave children are tied hand and foot to posts, exposed to a threatening rattlesnake (which promptly falls asleep), and finally are pursued by the entire Gemini fraternity on horseback. Each of the tests confirms that the girls are far less vulnerable than they look. Beneath his veil, Darger's impulses are being restrained by the aggressive and curiously masculine nature of the little girls he has created. The final test more than confirms the ability of the sisters to handle themselves in even the most threatening situations. Darger constructs this surprising scene outdoors, with cinematographic brilliance.

"I'm going to try you little girls at horseback riding," said the Gemini leader. "I have with me some horses that it usually takes men to ride, and these I will allow you little girls to mount. I'll take a number of horses, and pretend that we are Glandelinians. We'll do all we can to intercept you and see if you can escape us. If you do you'll pass the test."

This was prepared for and soon the little girls pretended as instructed to seize something from the Gemini leader which he had in his hands, and then at once they rode away. Within a minute's time the Gemini were after them a-tearing, and the pretense of persuing became a reality. Just as the little girls were gaining on the Gemini, they rode bodily into a large squadron of Glandelinian cavarly who had been out scouting ...

"There's nothing else to do but to let then know we can do some shooting," and the little girls immediately drew their pistols and poured a withering fire upon the confused persuers, bringing down about ten of the Glandelinians within a few minutes. The Glandelinians, who had never seen these little girls, were indeed surprised at this, for they had not expected what appeared to be seven pretty timid looking little girls to open fire upon them like that, and deal such accurate execution.

All of the Glandelinians who had been the target of the little girls were shot dead, the little girls in their wild frenzy not caring whom they shot down.

With the arrival on the scene of the Glandelinians, Darger's narrative, here as always, undergoes a massive loss of control, as the story veers out beyond the limits of what might be acceptable literature for children. What begins as a mildly seductive event in a dark room turns into a blood-bath, though on this occasion it is only a few nameless Glandelinians who are cut down. We are still only in volume one, and Darger has not yet discovered the enormity of his fantasies, or the extent to which some children in his story are vulnerable to the unrestrained violence of adults. For the present he is merely setting the scene.

Violet and her sisters passed the other tests easily enough, and they were immediately pronounced as perfect for the work of spying on the enemy. So Violet and her sisters received the permit and, later, as we progress through the great war, we'll see that Violet and her sisters proved themselves to be dangerous spies to the enemy, and spies whom they could never hold when captured.

Further Adventures of the Vivian Girls in Chicago

Nine months after the publication of *Alice in Wonderland* Lewis Carroll had begun to consider the possibility of a sequel.⁵² Emotionally he was still entangled with his internal Alice, and he was not yet ready to relinquish his involvement with her other world. The writing of *Through the Looking Glass* took place during the following four years.

Relatively late in the study of Darger's room and its chaotically disorganized contents, it was discovered that he too had become involved with the writing of a sequel to *In the Realms of the Unreal*. The discovery was hindered for a very long time because the pile of loose pages and school notebooks containing the later work lacked a title page.⁵³ Only after careful study of the fifteen volumes of the handwritten manuscript did it become evident that we were dealing with a distinct creation, a story which describes the further adventures of the Vivian girls, not in the Realms of the Unreal, but in Chicago. This separate work, consisting of over 8,000 pages, was therefore provided with a temporary title of its own, *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.⁵⁴ As was the case with Carroll, it is apparent that Darger, having brought *The Realms* to a close, felt unable to bring his long and intense involvement with the Vivian girls and their friends to an end. It is not known when he finished work on *The Realms*.⁵⁵ What is certain is that the composition of the sequel began in 1939.⁵⁶

The story is set in the Chicago of Henry's boyhood, in the area around Adams Street and Halsted where he lived as a child with his father. Strangely, it opens in September 1911, precisely the same year in which events get underway in *The Realms of the Unreal*. The Vivian girls, still Abbieannian princesses, are studying in Chicago at Henry's former elementary school. They are attending services at St. Patrick's Church, and live in a flat at 201 Halsted, just around the corner from Henry's former home. Oddly, they are living in poverty, and are being extremely badly treated. Their status as saintly exemplars of Catholic morality is, if anything, enhanced in this story, while the problems facing them involve new extremes of human and demonic immorality. So radical is this book, in its emphasis on violence and perverse sexuality, that it presents us with a serious problem. To explore it in any depth would completely overwhelm our investigation of Darger in the Realms of the Unreal, by plunging us into a morass of psychopathology with which we are not yet equipped to deal. For this reason, our brief investigation here of its subject matter will be confined to the insight it can provide concerning the later development of the Vivian girls and Darger, out beyond the Realms.⁵⁷ The Henry Darger we encounter as author of this later work seems significantly less naive and, in a curious way, more candid as he presents the reader with what are often overtly erotic sexual fantasies of a wildly perverse sadistic nature. Describing the rape and murder of a little girl, Darger comments, "I confess this causes me to lose my scientific poise."⁵⁸

While the split between good and evil, so firmly maintained in *The Realms*, continues into this work, there is an uneasy obscuring of boundaries as human beings and demonic spirits seem to blend casually into one another; with demons only marginally more violent and unrestrained than the human monsters who are also loose in Chicago. Once again Darger is obsessed: "men of a kind who had a lust or mania for seeing what is inside of human beings. To try this on a man or a woman they did not have the nerve, so they picked on a little boy or girl for that purpose."⁵⁹

At the center of the story is a struggle waged in a haunted house between the Vivian girls and an "unknown unseen demoniacal degenerate, a felon demon who obsessed the strangely afflicted house."⁶⁰ Darger explains:

The story I have to tell this time is a ghastly indictment of human lethargy and short-sightedness in dealing with the homicidal spiritual pervert ... I the writer declare before God that it need not have happened if parents would listen to reason and keep by force their children away from Seseman's dangerous house. A little nine year old girl had been strangled, raped, and horribly murdered, not by a wicked sex man monster this time, as at first supposed, but by one of the fierce demons in Seseman's house itself.⁶¹

Darger's erratic prose is beautifully adapted to the telling of ghost stories.⁶² He has a marvelous time inventing all sorts of supernatural and mysterious phenomena with which to astonish and terrify the children, who are now living in the house and dealing with its horrors on their own. A real surprise for us is the rediscovery of Penrod as a character in the story. Killed off at the end of *The Realms*, he is alive and well in Chicago. He is now identified as a brother of the Vivian girls, and the eighth member of the group of seven.⁶³ In the dining room of the haunted house, he encounters the strange "fire phenomenon."⁶⁴

In the dining room Penrod noticed a gas jet as having been lighted by whom he did not know ... As he reached up there started to come a real strange growling hissing sound, and as he turned the screw the flames suddenly grew bigger and started to curl along the ceiling (6.10).

... then there was a great roar and suddenly the whole room was enveloped in a rolling cloud of red and golden flames driving everyone out into the kitchen. It assumed a horrible shape with long hands clutching after them ... this dreadful phenomena lasted fully three minutes and gradually subsided with a moaning sound, as if someone was in awful pain.⁶⁵

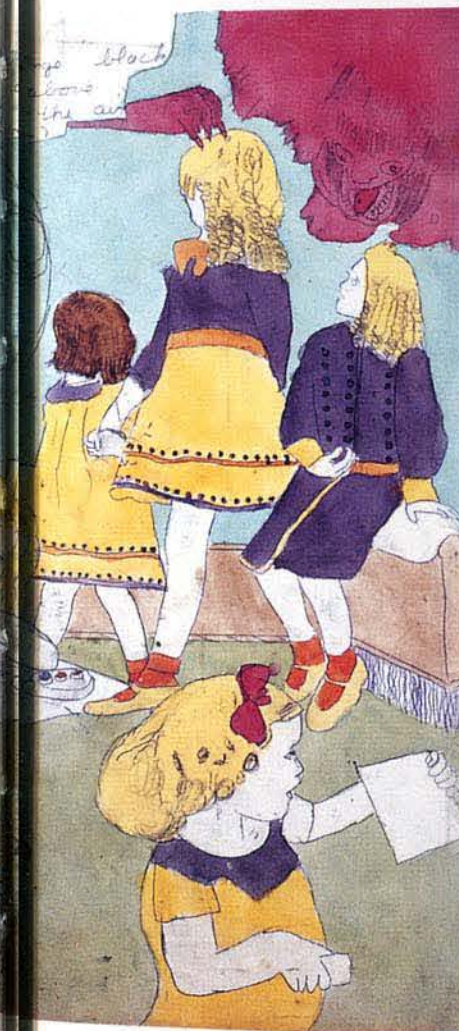
Although the tricks played by the demons initially seem tame, one soon senses that the Vivian girls, who have been called upon to grapple with demonic embodiments of hellish evil, are out beyond their depth, as is Darger himself. While he writes of this material with remarkable objectivity, sounding at times like a special investigator for the FBI, his "scientific poise" seems more like a pose desperately assumed to restrain an imminent move into action. The Darger we encounter as author in this work seems to be existing on the edge of madness, in real danger of toppling over the edge into the abyss.

A davenport like chair was standing in the middle of the kitchen ... As she wondered exceedingly and thought it odd, a strong scent of blood assailed her nostrils. She at the same time thought the chair bulked strangely on the seat in the semi-darkness, then as she switched on the light (it was a wonder the demons allowed her to turn it on), she perceived to her consternation that the nude body of a child was draped face down ward across the back of the chair. Blood covered the floor around the chair. Violet rushed over, choking back a scream of instinctive terror. She realized in a few seconds that she was looking at a gutted corpse. Internal organs lay on the seat of the chair, and some under the body. A sash had been looped four times around the neck. The mouth was wide open and the tongue was sticking far out straight. The face was bloody. A pair of short white socks and red sandals constituted the only clothing. At first glance Violet had recognized the pathetic

victim. The child was a daughter of the Flannigan family ... Pauline Flannigan the youngest of four children ... Pauline was just nine.⁶⁶

Darger's description of the death of this child in the kitchen of the haunted house goes on for over fifty pages, in the middle of which he informs us: "The description of the demonic rape is not to be given here. It is unprintable."⁶⁷ Whether he fully understood the terminology he employed or not, his account of the murder seems remarkably unrestrained given the period in which he was writing. Newspaper reports in the 1940s were never as detailed or as blunt as this in their accounts of the murder of children. What was Darger's model for this lurid style?

Pauline had been assaulted by the unseen powers in a criminal manner by the unseen powers of darkness. Her body had been maltreated and gutted with the most brutal violence, the back being also lacerated when it had been ground against the rough kitchen floor. Consummation of the rape was incomplete, though they had not been for want of making the attempt. In the coroner's opinion she had died of strangulation prior to the sexual attack. Demons leave no clues which might serve to establish the identification of the demon killer ... No knife or instrument of any kind had been used in the disembowelment process. Something like great gigantic claws had torn her body open, not literally open but almost apart, and stranger yet, her heart and lungs were not in the body and could not be found anywhere.⁶⁸



The Sacred Heart of Jesus

In *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, as in *The Realms*, religion, specifically Catholicism, is called upon to fend off, or control, the bizarre sexual and murderous impulses which are overwhelming the story and threatening the children. The Vivian girls are astonished to discover that their vaunted purity and spiritual sanctity is unable to stop the monstrous activities of the demons, or to prevent the continuing murders of little girls. In volume two they therefore conceive of an idea which they hope will stem the tide of evil inundating the haunted house. They will paint pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to hang on every floor. The design of the picture they plan to draw is utterly unique, and is described in great detail in the text. The startling fact is that one of these religious icons actually survived in Darger's room⁶⁹ (6.11).

"You asked me how a couple of Sacred Heart pictures made by our pure hands. Every one of us girls are experts in artistic work. But I don't mean sacred heart pictures we see always like those hanging in our home."

"But that's the only kind there ever are made," said they altogether again.

"True," admitted Violet, "But this is my plan. One of us could go with Penrod to a bookstore, and buy a volume that shows the organic system inside of us human beings. And therefore ..."

"Draw that," giggled James, "Violet is your upper story jangled out of tune?"

"No, no, wait until I explain. We can each make one sacred heart picture for every floor, but make the heart of natural form and beautify it and have each picture blessed."⁷⁰

The iconographic innovation proposed by Violet, an anatomically correct diagram of the heart borrowed from an anatomy book and traced into a traditional depiction of the Sacred Heart, is of special importance in clarifying the creative mechanisms at work, not in the Vivian girls, but in Darger. Faced with the task of rendering this traditional subject, Darger makes use of tracing to arrive at a successful image. However, he had a perfectly adequate picture of this kind in his room which he could have traced. Why did he not use it? The answer is obvious. He wishes to depict the missing heart of the murdered little girl Pauline Flannigan, and to conceal it in a place where it is extremely unlikely to be found. It is by way of this unconventional, and indeed heretical, route that he arrives at the utterly new and bizarre religious image Violet proposes to make. What we are witnessing is the formation of a compromise symbol; a strange merging of extreme violence and the sacred, of murderous lust and devout faith. Neither the children, nor Darger presumably, have any idea of what is going on. In Darger's work tracing never exists simply as an artistic procedure designed to avoid the necessity of freehand drawing. It is invariably a magical means of adopting powerful images, moving them into his world, and adapting them to his vastly different, hauntingly strange reality. He is engaged in a dangerous and original game, in which the wildly conflicting aspects of his internal world can find expression.

The children consult a priest, Father Carney, who approves of their plan, adding suggestions of his own to the planned image:

... "now, I advise you to follow out your plan, and bring the pictures to me to have them duly blessed. I'd advise you to have yourselves drawn into the picture too, as the demons fear and hate you, and also Angelinia Aronburg, Sally, and your friend Marjorie, as child angels."

"Only Girls, Father?"

"Yes."

"How should they be placed?"

"Underneath the heart, and all in red clothes and with purple ribbons. No hats."

"All right, Father." They thanked the priest and left.

As we read Darger's description of the evolving sacred image, it becomes obvious that he has a very unusual painting in mind, the first picture ever combining his little girl friends and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The question that arises is was he planning to paint such a picture someday in the future, or was he writing about and painting it at the same time? It is even possible that the text describes the evolution of a picture that he already had in front of him. In some respects this seems to be the case. Darger is obviously delighted with the notion that a picture in his room was painted, not by him, but by the Vivian girls themselves.

In their own place of abode they made the pictures, two of them. The sacred heart was in the center of the picture, each picture four feet long and three and one half foot wide.⁷¹

6.11

Henry Darger

Untitled [The Sacred
Heart of Jesus].

Left side of a two-
panel collage-drawing.

19 x 49 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.



The tallest of the Vivians, Joice and Jennie, were in the center. Joice was directly under the Sacred Heart, and so was Jennie, then Angeline, Catherine, Marjorie Masters to the left. Angelina Aronburg was to Joice's left, with Violet, Hettie, Daisy, and Sally Fielders following. There were ten baby angels, five clothed, the five youngest nude.

They couldn't for all the world put the dart through the heart, as it hurt their own too deeply, so they omitted the dagger and put a crucifix on top.

Every girl in the bottom of the picture were attired in red with purple hair ribbons and socks. Shoes were black. The two smaller Vivians wore crimson hats with purple streamers. The low neck bands were crimson. They did not put any one's name on the picture.

They wanted to put Penrod in [despite the priest's injunction], and at first he objected, but they insisted, so he said, "In disguise make me one of the angels holding a chalice." They did. He was Violet's size, and they made him the prettiest of the angels.

They took two days to draw the two pictures. The size of the heart was a foot, the size of the child angels according to their stations ... Their intention was the means of saving their lives. Penrod got frames made for them, and up they hung in the two flats of the "crazy house."⁷²

The sacred pictures fail completely to control or even modify the irrational events occurring in the demon-possessed house. This fact may reflect a psychological shift taking place within Darger himself, with his Catholic faith and morality beset by ever increasing internal forces driving him to give voice, at least symbolically, to the darkness within.

Comparison of the picture described in the text, with the surviving painting, confirms that many details were carried out as planned, while occasional departures from the text can be identified. Perhaps the most extreme departure from the proposed schema is the inclusion of a name tag above the head of each of the children. The tags do, however, serve to demonstrate that the order in which the little girls are arranged conforms exactly to that outlined in the text, though Darger has become somewhat confused with left and right. The number of baby angels, clothed and unclothed, does not conform to the number mentioned in the text. There are fourteen rather than ten, of which six are naked. One of the angels, right of center, does appear to be a boy, though he does not carry a chalice. There are also minor discrepancies concerning the color of the children's outfits and shoes.

It would seem that Darger was describing an actual picture. Nowhere in *The Realms* does he describe any scene, or painted picture, in such specific compositional and iconographic detail. It is extremely unlikely that the illustration emerged later, and that he then executed it in exact conformity to the written description. More probable is that he had begun a picture centered on a borrowed depiction of an anatomically correct heart, with the children, in the order mentioned, below. The text, I believe, was written during the painting of the picture, with the painting brought to completion shortly after the writing was concluded. Darger then allowed himself to depart from the written description in few details.⁷³ If my account of the more or less simultaneous emergence of text and picture is correct, it implies that fully developed collage-drawings were being produced in the early 1940s, and that Darger was both writing and drawing at the same time. The absence of any photographic enlargement in this picture accords with the date, established earlier, for Darger's first drugstore orders for photographic enlargements (1944).

What is significant is the undeniable fact that Darger felt an overwhelming desire from the beginning to externalize his fantasy world in pictorial images, not just in writing. Exactly the same need made itself felt, at the same juncture, in the case of Lewis Carroll. In terms of internal processes, it is possible that pictures, with their more concrete and sensual physical reality, satisfying a deeply felt need, ultimately assumed greater importance than writing for both men.

Seeing Alice: Carroll as Illustrator

Lewis Carroll's lifelong involvement with image-making, drawing, and later photography, is less well known than his celebrated career as a writer of stories for children. Nevertheless, anyone with a knowledge of the history of photography is aware of his reputation as the single most important photographer of children in the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ On the other hand, a sensitive and thorough evaluation of his drawings, and in particular of the illustrations he did for *Alice's Adventures Underground*, has yet to be carried out.⁷⁵

Carroll's boyhood writings and drawings are of unique importance in providing a rare opportunity to study the unfolding of the creative process, from its origins in childhood, through to the mature productions of the adult artist and writer. From the very beginning the two forms of expressive activity, drawing and writing, were linked in his mind, with almost all of the surviving drawings made as illustrations for his writings, exactly as is the case with Darger. We suspect that in Darger's case too involvement with writing and the making of images may have originated in childhood, proceeding through an uninterrupted development into his late teens when the writing of *The Realms* began.

Carroll's situation in early life differed fundamentally from Darger's, in that all of his early stories and drawings were invented to entertain his sisters and brothers.⁷⁶ He continued to produce work specially designed for the family through his early twenties, with the accompanying illustrations gaining in expressive power and humor as he grew older. Later in life, drawing continued to function as a means of establishing contact with children.

Carroll felt perfectly at ease with a little girl sitting on his knee, while he invented stories and drew freehand illustrations.

*... we used to sit on the big sofa on each side of him, while he told us stories, illustrating them by pencil or ink drawings as he went along. He seemed to have an endless store of these fantastical tales which he made up as he told them, drawing busily on a large sheet of paper.*⁷⁷

It is absolutely impossible to imagine Henry functioning in such a casual and yet intimate situation. His work, although it revolves almost exclusively around children, seldom suggests the kind of careless spontaneity and ease that one might expect of a story told to a living child. Similarly, his collage-drawings are far more elaborate and formal than anything Carroll ever contemplated as illustrations for a child audience. Carroll never drew for adults. Only much later in life did he allow drawings, which had originated in a situation of relative intimacy, to find their way out into the world.⁷⁸ Like Darger, Carroll entertained doubts about his ability to draw "realistically," in a style that would be acceptable to adults.⁷⁹ What is evident, however, is that both men were absolutely driven to draw. It seems to have been vitally important, indeed absolutely essential, for them to find a means of embodying their internal vision in images, and not just in words. At the very core of this need was a single image — the troubling vision of a little girl.

UNQUESTIONABLY, the most important group of drawings Lewis Carroll produced was the set of pen-and-ink illustrations he drew for the manuscript version of *Alice's Adventures Underground*. As he made them, over the course of almost two years (1863–64), he had no intention of using them for any other purpose than as a gift for his child friend Alice Liddell. The process of creation was, however, made more complex because of the presence of an internal Alice, existing within Carroll himself: an inner child who was rapidly assuming far greater reality than the "real" Alice. Later in his life Carroll himself perceived the difference between the two — he called Alice his "dream-child," "named after a real Alice, but none the less a dream-child and her Wonderland."⁸⁰ It was this inner and ideal Alice who now emerged in the drawings, and it is her strange and marvelously unreal world that he sought to embody in pictures. The story had come into being in words. Now it was depicted by Carroll in images which inevitably led deeper into his inner world, revealing his private vision of how it all looked. Alice appears in almost every illustration in the book. The changing images of her face and body convincingly reflect Carroll's internal image: his longing, his desire, his perfect little girl.

We know that Darger too created in response to, and possibly for, an inner child, elaborating an austere world in which he and his lost sister might be at home. Perhaps the fact that the child for whom he created was more thoroughly a child of his imagination than Carroll's Alice allowed him greater creative freedom. Carroll's graphic embodiment of Alice's world does seem to take reality into consideration, but only to a limited

extent. While in no sense Outsider Art, these pictures, precisely because of their distance from academic convention and professional slickness, carry us into unseen realms and unexplored territory. As drawings they originate in an intensely private, deeply subjective inner vision, and it is this unusual origin which allies them with Darger's creative experience as illustrator of *The Realms*. While there are no points of formal similarity, Carroll's portrayal of little Alice would certainly have appealed to Darger. Did he know her?⁸¹ There is also an affinity between Carroll's bizarre talking animals and the Blengiglomenean serpents we encounter in *The Realms* (see, for example, Carroll's portrayal of the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle dancing the Lobster Quadrille). Carroll made use of natural history books in developing some of the strange creatures that inhabit his underworld, a procedure that would have seemed perfectly natural to Darger.

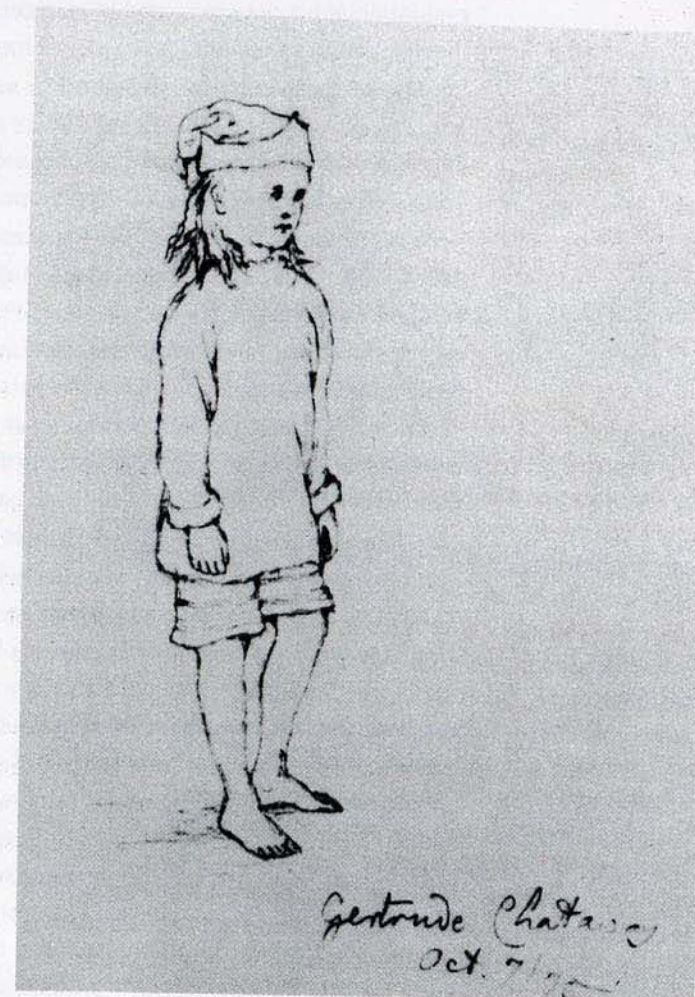
On rare occasions Carroll employed a procedure not available to Darger, the drawing of actual little girls from life. An example is his portrait, drawn on the beach at Sandown, of little Gertrude Chataway in a fisherman's jersey and cap (6.12).⁸² While these later, more realistic, drawings of his little girlfriends are the least interesting of his graphic products, they do reveal qualities which bring them close to Darger's drawing style. One senses this, both in the uncertain and tentative quality of the line, and more strongly in the feeling of heightened innocence in the child herself. It is possible to feel Carroll's fascination. There is in the drawing an unconscious embodiment of the essential characteristics he looked for in the children he sought so ardently at the seashore. Years later, he still recalled these blissful encounters. "I have a yet clearer memory (like a dream of fifty years ago!) of a little bare-legged girl in a sailor's jersey, who used to run up into my lodgings by the sea."⁸³ Comparison of this sketch of Gertrude with one of Darger's numerous renditions of the "little girl with a pail" reveals a common underlying identity of desire (see illustration 3.66).

As both artists developed, the world they sought to portray became increasingly a world inhabited by beautiful little girls. For this shift into the child world to occur, both of them began to feel a need for new technical procedures, and for the use of "borrowed images." Not surprisingly, both men turned, in radically different ways, to photography.⁸⁴

6.12

Lewis Carroll

Drawing of Gertrude Chataway in a Fisherman's Jersey and Cap. October 7, 1875.



Photography as a Means of Possession

It is difficult for us now to imagine the extraordinary impact of photographs on nineteenth-century viewers encountering them for the first time. Photography, in its stunning realism, seemed to possess the near miraculous power of seizing an image, and mysteriously capturing its physical essence. Photographs offered a uniquely private means of possession and contemplation. Its sexual implications would have been evident at once; the strange mixture of intimacy and distance inherent in this art exerted a special fascination on certain susceptible individuals.⁸⁵

Lewis Carroll's first photographs were made in 1856, fifteen years after the invention of photography. He is therefore seen as a pioneer in this new art form, and one of its most important early practitioners. From the beginning he made use of the camera to capture the faces and figures of the little girls by whom he was obsessed.⁸⁶ He was twenty-four years old, and female children had become his chief and only sexual object. For the next twenty-four years he devoted a major part of his life to this highly specialized branch of portraiture, and to the pursuit of its juvenile objects.⁸⁷

As a mode of image-making, photography conformed to an unusual extent to Carroll's aesthetic and erotic needs. His compulsive attraction to little girls focused, as we have seen, almost entirely on their physical attributes and on the act of seeing. Almost every reference to his child friends in his

journal confirms this observation. In 1855 he met Frederika Liddell, Alice's cousin, and observed: "One of the most lovely children I ever saw, gentle and innocent looking, not an inanimate doll-beauty ... One of the nicest children I have ever seen, as well as the prettiest: dear, sweet, pretty little Frederika!" Then he met her sister: "even prettier than my little favorite, Freddie: indeed she has quite the most lovely face I ever saw in a child."⁸⁸ So intense was his need to photograph these objects of his desire, that at times it almost seems that the little girls existed only to be photographed, and that his ultimate aim was the possession of an image. The photographer Brassai, writing of Carroll's portraits said:

*What surprises one in looking at all of these pictures of little girls is the extraordinary seriousness of the faces — none of the young ladies smile. They all have the slightly melancholic expression of the poet about them, a dreamy look that was probably accentuated by the necessity of holding the lengthy poses.*⁸⁹

The many photographs Carroll took of Alice Liddell are particularly revealing in this respect. His finest portraits are those involving a child he had come to know and love. Nevertheless, in observing the endless parade of little girls who paused briefly before his lens, we are forced to realize that they were all transitory embodiments of an unchanging inner image, which ultimately was an aspect of Carroll himself. This was no less true of the thousands of little girls drawn over the years by Darger.

Carroll used the camera as a means of pursuit, with photography serving to obtain the compliance of the parents of the children he admired. Writing of the experience of contemplating a naked child model, he says, "I think a spectator would have to be really in search of evil thought to have any other feeling about her than simply a sense of beauty, as in looking at a statue."⁹⁰ One of his more perceptive, and honest, biographers, responding to this observation, remarks:

*Few passages in Carroll give such a sense, not precisely of duplicity, but of such determination not to see what must have been crystal clear to him ... Was this aesthetic delight the only delight Carroll felt? I feel by no means sure.*⁹¹

Unlike Darger, Carroll had no Glandelinians upon whom to project his darker feelings. He confessed to occasional sleepless nights troubled by "unholy thoughts, which torture with their hateful presence the fancy that would fain be pure."⁹² In contrast, it is doubtful that Darger ever recognized such struggles within himself. Protected by the far deeper, and more obviously pathological divisions within his psyche, he was also free of the turmoil and joy caused by intimate contact with real children. His art failed to provide him with a means of relating to the outer world, or of responding to living objects of desire.

GIVEN THE LARGELY unconscious but overwhelmingly powerful sexual drives that motivated both of these men, it is not surprising that they found means of depicting little girls without clothing.

Carroll's involvement with nude photography came late in his career, beginning in 1867. He led up to this climactic achievement with photographs of little girls in nightgowns, in "primitive" costume, and in various partial states of undress. The nature of his ultimate goal was, however, perfectly obvious, except perhaps to himself.

... if I had the loveliest child in the world, to draw or photograph, and found she had a modest shrinking (however slight, and easily overcome) from being taken nude, I should feel it was a solemn duty, owed to God, to drop the request altogether.⁹³

Once he had experienced the joy of photographing children "sans habilement" (the term is Carroll's), his ingenuity in arranging for the repetition of the experience is astonishing, his persistence with mothers of admired little girls embarrassing. His high-sounding justifications for his encounters with the "souls" of his child friends ("I have been largely privileged in tete-a-tete intercourse with children. It is very healthy and helpful to one's own spiritual life: and humbling too, to come into contact with souls so much purer, and nearer to God, than one feels oneself to be"⁹⁴) remind one of Darger's elaborate explanations for the "nuded" appearance of the Vivian girls or other children in

so many of the collage-drawings. The complicated rationales offered by both men contrast markedly with the ease, even delight, with which the children, real or imaginary, shed their garments.

... I thought the children so nervous I would not even ask for "bare feet" and was agreeably surprised to find they were ready for any amount of undress, and seemed delighted at being allowed to run about naked.⁹⁵

Like Darger, Carroll's interest in naked children was confined entirely to girls.

I confess I do not admire naked boys in pictures. They always seem to me to need clothes: whereas one hardly sees why the lovely forms of girls should ever be covered up!⁹⁶

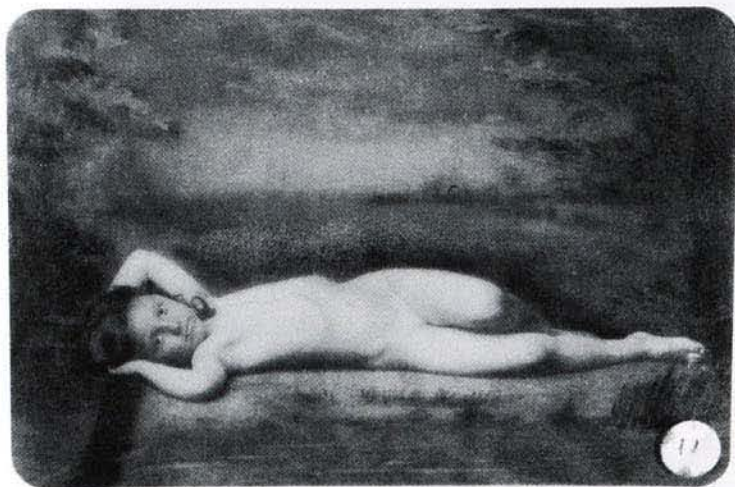
Only a small number of Carroll's nude photographs of children survive.⁹⁷ These works, because of their unusual form, introduce surprising parallels with Darger's collage-drawings. Each of these pictures is a complex creation, involving the addition of color, the combining of photography and painting, various technical innovations, as well as the "borrowed hand" of another artist. Created, it seems, for presentation to the children's families, these overpainted photographs play down, or disguise, the unadorned realism of a black-and-white photograph of a naked child, by providing a softly atmospheric or romantic setting. We must be aware that we are no longer looking at a work which is purely Carroll's vision. Another artist has

been called upon to color his photograph, and to add a landscape background. But, curiously, it is precisely this element of collaboration which brings Carroll's practice close to Darger's working method. Both artists became involved in assembling a new creation, by removing a child from its environment, and placing it in a new and arbitrary setting.

Darger felt fully competent to invent a wide range of backgrounds, landscapes, architectural settings, etc. A master of color, he had no inhibition about adding dazzlingly original, often wildly unnatural hues to borrowed black-and-white images. On occasion, these original images were photographs. Carroll, in contrast, obviously felt unsure both of his skills as a colorist, and of his ability to invent appropriately realistic or artistic settings. Given his more sophisticated social adaptation, his borrowing of images involved the commissioning of a professional painter, rather than the adoption of previously existing images. The result in both cases is a kind of collage. Carroll made use of his own photographs to provide the figure of the child, though on one occasion the landscape artist traced his photograph onto a sheet of paper to obtain a simple line-drawing, and then painted the entire composition in watercolor, in this way precisely anticipating Darger's tracing technique.⁹⁸ As we know, Darger's technique also involved photography, whenever he wished to obtain a photograph of a child's figure of suitably large size. The essential difference between the procedures of the two

6.13

**Lewis Carroll and
Anne Lydia Bond**
Untitled [Watercolor
drawing of Beatrice
Hatch]. Tracing copy
of a Carroll photo-
graph with color and
background added
by Miss Bond.
Rosenbach Founda-
tion, Philadelphia.



artists is that in Darger's case no actual child's body entered into the process. As far as we know, he had no experience of children's naked bodies. This fact necessarily enhanced the fantastic quality of his pictures of child life.

There is one Carroll photograph which offers interesting points of comparison with Darger's conception of the nude (6.13).⁹⁹ The Darger picture which comes closest to Carroll's photograph is entitled *At Jennie Richee. Storm continues. Lightning strikes shelter but no one is injured* (see illustration 7.30). This beautiful work is very unusual in its overly conscious presentation of a reclining, slightly adolescent, female form. Both pictures share a quality of overt eroticism rare even in depictions of naked children. They both seem to imply a vague familiarity with one or another example of the theme of the reclining nude or odalisque, an important image in the history of Western art. Darger's coy child-woman was undoubtedly based on some such borrowed image, though the model behind his picture has not yet been identified. Carroll has also been influenced strongly by memories of a reclining adult nude, perhaps Goya's *Naked Maja*. For both of the child pictures the result involves an unsettling element of overconsciousness which troubles an otherwise innocent image. In Carroll's case the effect is more disturbing, in that the child's unnatural pose and expression, in my view, reflects her

discomfort, even anxiety, in a situation of considerable vulnerability. Perhaps some of his child models were not as comfortable in a state of undress as Carroll liked to believe. In its original black-and-white format, this highly contrived child nude would have been disturbingly perverse. The character and implications of Darger's version of the odalisque theme will be discussed in the next chapter (see pp. 406–407). What is clear is that neither artist approached the body of a naked child with true innocence; in each case sexuality, however repressed, troubled the water.¹⁰⁰

A World of Little Girls: Darger as Illustrator

All true artists, and by no means only the Outsiders, carefully conceal a certain part of their artistic production from the world. The motivation for producing and then hiding images or texts obviously varies from century to century. At certain periods work is hidden because it is too overtly sexual, perverse, or violent, or because it fails to disguise sufficiently unacceptable desires or private fantasies. True Outsider artists differ from professional artists in that a rare few actually manage to conceal the whole of their creative output, thus giving rise to that impossible paradox, the secret work of art.¹⁰¹ Both Lewis Carroll and Henry Darger produced a body of secret art. They differ in terms of how much of their externalized fantasy was concealed. Carroll's work, his writings and drawings, was created to be shared, if only with one significant other. His photographs found an audience among his acquaintances. Only his nude photographs of children, hidden for the most part from eyes other than his own, and finally destroyed, can accurately be described as secret works of art.¹⁰² On the other hand, the whole of Darger's oeuvre (despite his acute consciousness of an imaginary audience or reader) belongs in this rare category. Additionally, it is probable that while he did not himself see to its destruction he assumed that that would be its fate.¹⁰³ The possibility of the secret work of art presents us with a host of perplexing

problems, not the least of which is the question of why it is called into existence. The terminology and language of art, riddled with unexamined assumptions, must be considered and used with great care in such an unusual context.

Fantasy, as long as it is confined within the mind, remains safely private; shared with no one it represents a true secret creation. Fantasies employ images, more rarely words (with occasional contributions from other sense organs), but we are not in the habit of conceiving of exclusively internal images, however rich, inventive, or powerful they may be, as art. For art to be a possibility, internal imagery must, as a first and simplest requirement, be given external form. It must also be shared.¹⁰⁴ So rare is it for the mental constructs of fantasy to be given external form, so unusual the circumstances, and so great the psychic energy involved, that the occasional embodiment of the internal world of the imagination in external and expressive form demands explanation. In a real sense this is the problem we have been grappling with in examining the creative process of Lewis Carroll, and to a far greater extent that of Henry Darger.

The inner world to which both men gave expression was a world of little girls. The motivating force in both individuals was a complex derivative of the massive repression of sexual and aggressive energy.¹⁰⁵ In writing of Alice, Carroll involved himself with one little girl and the enormously

complex and confusing environment in which she found herself. Darger's other world, by contrast, involved large numbers of little girls, with one child or another moving to center stage, but always surrounded by others. It was clearly calculated to place him in a society of girls. Although part of Darger's childhood, and all of his adolescence was spent in a community exclusively consisting of boys, he would certainly have been aware, at least during his stay in the Lincoln Asylum, that the institution also contained a matching society of girls. Once he began to create a world of his own that is where he found himself, in a world of little girls. This was the first and fundamental direction taken by his fantasy. From the beginning it was not shared. Darger seems to have understood that this was a move that had to be concealed. The problem of concern to us, at this point, is how little girls fit into his pictorial art. What is the function of an art of little girls?

IN DISCUSSING the art of Lewis Carroll and, still more, that of Henry Darger, it is common, indeed necessary, to employ the term "illustration." Both men sought consciously to extend their writings by introducing illustrations as an essential addition to a previously existing narrative text. Carroll's photographs, on the other hand, do not function as illustrations. Taken together, they compose a separate world of little girls, created largely for his own pleasure rather than for an audience. As I hope to demonstrate, many of Darger's collage-

drawings were called into existence for exactly similar reasons, as a separate world of little girls in which he might safely and pleasurably exist.

Precise labels on some of Darger's pictures enable us to locate the passage of text they are intended to illustrate. These pictures clearly depict specific events, and possess strong narrative qualities. They are on the whole the less complex pictures, as well as the smaller ones. They include fewer figures, often just the seven Vivian sisters, engaged in performing an easily identifiable task, which the label then explains. However, study of a wide range of Darger's colored drawings reveals that only a limited number of his images can truly be said to illustrate a specific and readily identifiable passage in the text.¹⁰⁶ Many of his pictures are rather more generic, depicting a type of event that occurs repeatedly. Even a recognizable place-name, or reference to a specific battle, may not be sufficient to allow a scene to be linked with an event occurring at a precise point in the text.

Darger certainly saw his pictures as illustrations, and used the concept of illustration to justify his compulsive involvement with picture-making, just as the elaboration of a vast history of an unreal world was used to account for his obsessional involvement with writing. Some of the time he was, very evidently, preoccupied with the task of illustration in the narrowest sense. But, at other times, and increasingly, it is evident that different processes and needs took over, and large compositions with huge numbers of little girls emerged which had little or nothing to do with the graphic portrayal of a specific moment in *The Realms*. Were it not for these other powerful and unacknowledged motivations, Darger might be seen simply as a naive illustrator of children's books.

Darger understood enough to know that his art could not be shared, nor was there any reason for it to be so. Despite its extraordinary beauty this was probably an art not meant to be seen.¹⁰⁷ What he sought, both in his writings and drawings, was a private world in which he could be alone with his little girls, uninhibited by the presence of any spectators or any adults. The essential participants, as opposed to spectators, were the female children. In their absence Darger's art is unimaginable. Even Henry himself was not primarily a viewer, but a participant. A striking example of the difference is provided by a magnificent collage-drawing of a massacre of children (6.14). At the center of this gruesome event is a large-scale head

of a child in torment, her anguished expression revealing the terrible agony of strangulation. Reaching into the composition from below are the life-size hands of her assailant, an unseen monster standing just beyond the picture plane, in front of and facing the child. We have to assume that they are the hands of Henry Darger, reaching into the picture to strangle the child.¹⁰⁸ No one else was there.

The essential purpose of these endless depictions of little girls was not illustration, but "embodiment." Darger drew in order to be intimately in touch with the bodies of little girls, with drawing as a means of possession. As with anyone involved in a sexual act, or in intimacies of less specific kinds, he needed to be alone with the object of his desire.

In Darger's alternate world adults are rare, and mothers seem to have been systematically avoided. I know of only two collage-drawings in which large-scale depictions of adult women appear, representing the mother and aunt of the Vivian girls¹⁰⁹ (see illustration 5.7). Significantly, one of these pictures includes another very rare image — a baby.¹¹⁰ The label explains, *At Julio Callio, Via Norma. Though all are annihilated, the Vivian girls and their mother and aunt escape with their lives, though their parent and aunt are severely injured about their heads. Their mother and aunt saved two children.* In the large-scale portrait of the Vivian girls' mother, she is depicted with very black hair.

She holds a baby in her arms. This is a unique example in Darger's art of the theme of "mother and child," an image which, given his intense religiosity, one might have expected to occur with some frequency. The rarity of this subject, in both text and pictures, is paralleled and in part explained by the extreme rarity of any reference to his mother and baby sister in any of his writings. The exclusion of adult women from both his life and art is indicative of massive inhibition and of acute anxiety. Adult males, and occasional boys, appear more frequently in the drawings than women do, and males occupy a far less prominent position in the pictures than they do in the text. In his writings boys and boy scouts play a considerable role. The little girls are clearly attracted to boys and impressed, though not awed, by men.

The illustrations very definitely go much further than the text in creating a world of little girls, with some pictures filled with female children in numbers far surpassing the requirements of the narrative. Just as Alice appears in almost all of Carroll's illustrations, the seven Vivian princesses are almost invariably present in Darger's pictures. Like Carroll, Darger's only interest was in pretty little girls. No unsightly, fat, ugly, or deformed children are depicted in the collage-drawings (if we exclude the horribly mutilated and fragmented bodies of children massacred by the Glandelinians — which Darger referred to as "physiologies"). While this is, in part, explained by the limited pictorial sources he drew upon for his "borrowed children," it also conformed to his erotic needs. Henry certainly accepted all of the popular conventions concerning ideal, desirable, and cute little girls. And, inevitably, these were the stereotypical images of childhood and femininity which found

expression in advertisements, children's fashion illustrations, and in coloring books. It is evident that he truly loved elaborate party dresses, night-gowns, frilly bonnets, and colored hair ribbons, and all kinds of richly decorated children's clothing. He did not merely accept the clothes provided by his sources; carefully coordinated colors and complex additional patterns were invariably added to the children's outfits by Darger himself. He betrays an intense interest in and knowledge of little girls' clothing.

What is surprising is not Darger's acceptance of the conventional image of an ideal little girl, but his creation, within that visual formula, of female children of courage, resilience, and power. The fundamental split in *The Realms* is not between boys and girls, it is between the energetic, self-possessed, and often violent Vivian girls and their girl scout armies, and the child slaves (mostly female) who lack any capacity to resist adult male aggression, functioning simply as passive victims. This split is strongly emphasized in the writings, though the narrative focuses primarily on the adventures of Darger's warrior maidens. But, despite their masculine skills and innate toughness, these little girls relinquish nothing with regard to beauty. And whatever the extent of their courage or valor, it is their physical appearance which clearly dazzled Darger.



6.14

Henry Darger

Untitled [Massacre of Children]. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, and attached collage fragments. 19 x 24 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Standing on the sand, as lovely and radiant as on the day she was wounded at that Santa Fe battle, was Angelinia Aronburg, the highest of the girl leaders next to Violet and her sisters. The designs on her large heart shaped hat glittered and flashed in the glare of one of the camp fires, her long bobbed golden hair tumbled in a bright shower of ringlets, to her gold girdled coat shoulder epaulettes sic. Her silken yellow uniform dress floated out like a yellow cloud in the late afternoon warm wind. Never had she appeared so young and beautiful.

Head over heels the general's son drove into the river."

Darger's delight in feminine dress is most clearly expressed pictorially in his invention of suitable uniforms for the Vivian girls, and their girl and boy scout friends. Christian uniforms couldn't be borrowed. They had, therefore, to be created by Darger as designer. That he enjoyed this assignment is suggested by the fact that, even within a single painting, he seldom repeats a uniform without introducing variations for each little girl's scout dress (6.15). The constantly changing military outfits are a source of humor and spectacle. Even the official Christian colors submit to endless variation. A standard feature, which he often mentions in the text without offering an explanation, is the palette-shaped hat worn by all officers of the girl scout regiments, "a highly decorated hat in the form of a large Valentine heart" (see illustration 5.1). Even in full uniform, the Vivian girls remain pretty little girls, and when not on duty, they revert to the party dresses Darger obviously thought appropriate for princesses. In the collage-

6.15

Henry Darger

Are captured again by Glandelinians. Left panel of a three-panel collage-drawing. 22 x 79 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



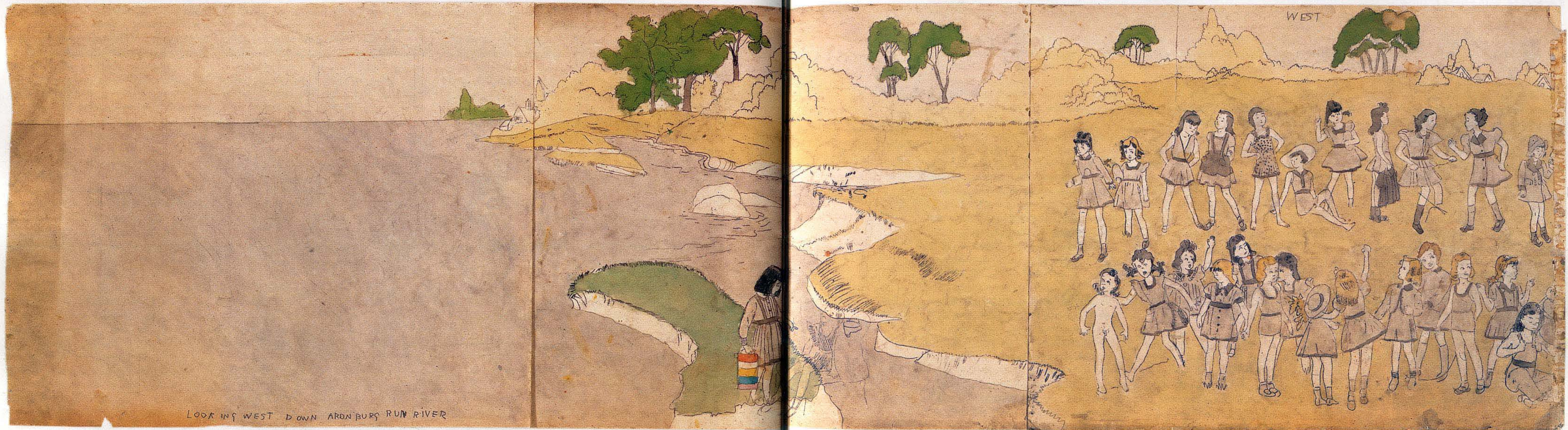
drawings it is inevitably the beauty of the children that comes across most strongly, since their capacity for bravery or violence is less easily depicted. It is this element of charm, the irresistible cuteness of the little girls in Darger's art, which has tended to encourage naive viewers to overlook the reality of his vision. In the absence of any acquaintance with his writings, or of the nature of his fantasies concerning the activities and adventures of the little girls, his pictorial world has been equated with folk art, and the calculated innocence of his pictorial sources confused with his reality. It is worth considering that illustration 6.15 is one of relatively few collage-drawings in which the Vivian girls, "captured again by the Glandelinians," have not been stripped naked by their captors.

The uniforms worn by the opposing forces in *The Realms* provide for the possibility of disguise, with the Vivian girls and their child friends regularly adopting the drab gray uniforms of the Glandelinians (6.16). Although in the text the scout leaders, when out on spying expeditions, almost invariably choose to disguise themselves as boys (often Glandelinian boy scouts), in the pictures it seems that Darger couldn't bring himself to depict his beloved little heroines in boys' clothes. It was difficult enough to deprive them of the rich colors and patterns in which they normally appeared. In such extreme situations it was better to simply deprive them of clothing altogether. Naked little girls, while revealing far more than Darger anticipated, don't betray their religious or national affiliations.

Like some of Carroll's little friends, Darger's girls were more than eager to run about in a state of nature and, like Carroll, Darger clearly preferred them that way. Only such a preference can explain the fact that in more than half of all the collage-drawings the Vivian girls and other children are naked. While, on the picture labels, Darger occasionally provides a written rationale for this far from logical state of affairs, his explanations for the children's "nuded" state are seldom either rational or convincing. What is significant is that, in the absence of an audience, he still felt the need to explain. No one, reading the text, could ever anticipate or account for the extent of nudity revealed in the drawings. Ultimately, nudity became so common a feature of the pictures that explanations were neither possible nor necessary. It is this obvious preference for naked little girls that provides a clear indication that the function of the collage-drawings was not primarily illustration.

At times, as in the picture *At Aronburgs Run, Via Glorinia. Child slaves which Violet and her sisters saw and desired to rescue*, the nudity of the children is justified by the fact that they are child slaves (see illustration 11.1). The Glandelinians are absolutely clear about their preference for naked little girls, and child slaves are invariably kept in a state of undress. Any child falling into their hands is stripped of clothing at once. For this reason, in most scenes involving these evil male adults and captured children, the children are portrayed without clothes. Since the Vivian girls are similarly portrayed, that is, without uniforms or matching dresses, Darger was faced with the

problem of distinguishing them from slaves. He enjoys the puzzle, challenging us with the information: "Vivian girls among slaves, try and find them." Hair color is invariably employed to solve the problem, since the Vivian girls, and conveniently no other children, have dazzlingly beautiful blond hair. Shoes and socks are not usually used as a distinguishing feature. Apart from saving Darger the trouble of redrawing borrowed images so as to show bare feet, naked children in shoes and socks may also have carried an erotic charge. When wearing shoes and socks, a nude invariably becomes a naked little girl. Pictures combining child slaves and the Vivian sisters "sans habillement" commonly allow us to confirm the fact that all little girls in Darger's world possess penises. His use of white or unpainted flesh tones tends to reduce the color scale of these otherwise elaborate slave scenes. The pale tonality then has the advantage, when such scenes involve a massacre, of causing blood to show up unusually clearly.



6.16

Henry Darger

Looking West Down Aronburg Run River. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 19 x 70 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Landscape, with Frieze of Girls¹¹²

Darger's collage-drawings grew much larger over time, becoming at once more complex and more ordered. These later, more elaborate and contrived, compositions reflect, not only an enormous increase in technical skill, and a far more conscious manipulation of surface design and color, but also seem to imply major changes in the function of picture-making for the artist. These long panoramic pictures, which for the most part belong to the period after the writing of *The Realms* and its sequel had been completed, reflect major psychological shifts within Darger himself, changes in internal experience and energy for which, alas, they provide the only evidence.¹¹³ Unconscious changes in his creative process, paralleled by developments in his pictorial format and sense of design, permitted him to give expression to kinds of internal experience which prose and simple narrative illustration had not allowed him to explore. Although the pictures still carry identifying labels linking them with *The Realms*, and specifically with the place name Jennie Richee, they no longer serve as narrative illustrations. Standing on their own as independent compositions, they require a slower and more contemplative response from the viewer. Frequently, the world they portray seems only remotely connected with the grim unreality described in *The Realms* (see illustration 6.1).

These long horizontal pictures, some of which are larger than any previously attempted by Darger, seem to have been created exclusively as settings for large numbers of children, providing a new, gentler, and more idealized environment in which they might live in ways more clearly those of children. They seem to reflect a move taking place within Darger from epic prose to lyric poetry. In these works he reveals a deep awareness of connections between children, naked or clothed, and nature. To an extent certainly not implied by the story, the children are depicted out of doors in landscape settings of unusual beauty. They are clearly part of nature, but a contrived nature adapted to their reality as children. Henry readily accepted conventional metaphors associating little girls and flowers; with children arranged in elegant and controlled groupings in gardens filled with wildly unnatural flowers of his imagining. The brilliant hues of the little girls' dresses are carefully matched with those of the gigantic blossoms.¹¹⁴

In such a setting, play becomes the main activity of the little girls and, in a deeper sense, the essence of Darger's approach to creativity itself. These flower-filled landscapes became a space in which he and the children could play. The time needed to execute these elaborate compositions provided the hours and days during which Henry, cutting out, tracing, and coloring in, could be a little girl among little girls.¹¹⁵ Environments rather than pictures, these garden settings represent safe places in which to be little, in which to play. Time seems to stop, or at least to slow down, in many of the images. The frenetic activity of the Vivian girls, who are always on the run in the narrative scenes, seems to become more measured in these tranquil landscapes in which the shifting

moods of nature seem to influence and calm their need for ceaseless activity. The children's moods seem intentionally linked with the weather. Anxiety, while occasionally implied, is but dimly perceived; danger, only rarely in evidence, is generally far off. The dramatic skies, now at their finest, and still more reflective of Darger's deepest feelings, contribute in a major way to the emotional content of these haunting portrayals of children in nature.

A beautiful composition in the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, entitled *Storm Brewing*, provides a useful illustration of some of the characteristics we are examining (6.17). To a certain extent it is transitional between the activity of the earlier narrative pictures, and the more tranquil later compositions to which it ultimately belongs. The scene is divided in half by the white pillar of an overhanging shelter. At left, all is calm, nothing is happening. At right, because of the storm's rapid approach, the excited children are fleeing from menacing darkness. Tossed by the wind, trees and flowers yield to the powers of nature uncontrolled. Anxious little girls are pulled along by their umbrellas, hats take off through the air. The swelling masses of dark clouds might almost signal the presence of war on the distant horizon; while the black strip of sky, always associated by Darger with destruction and death, implies an approaching tempest of unusual violence. Only the Blengins, with their brilliant butterfly wings untroubled by the rising wind, seem unconcerned. They, after all, are part of nature, themselves manifestations of its power.

On the right side, activity is replaced by the timeless immobility which was modifying much of Darger's vision. The children here seem posed as if for a photograph, in a frieze that stretches like a row of flowers across the picture plane. In all these pictures the little girls seem to have grown younger, still more innocent. One of the curious and unexplained characteristics of these pictures is the puzzling, but delightful, replication of more or less identical figures of the same little girl, in identical polka-dot dresses, carefully arranged in overlapping groups. While we may suspect that the Vivian girls are concealed among them, an overabundance of blond children makes it difficult if not impossible to find them. Another puzzle (to be discussed in the following chapter) is the mysterious tendency of the little girls and Blengiglomenean serpents to merge, with horned Blengins in dresses all but indistinguishable from the children. All of these narrative details seem no longer to matter.

While aspects of war or adult aggression rarely enter these compositions (explosions and enemy soldiers occasionally appear in the distance), storms are frequent, with violent winds indicated by all sorts of flying objects. Lightning, in the depiction of which Darger was a master, is a source of excitement rather than danger. In many scenes the children and their Blengin friends take cover under overhanging roofs to watch the approaching storm or the falling rain. In this picture, even the giant flowers seem, with the assistance of the children, to have taken cover under the sheltering roof.

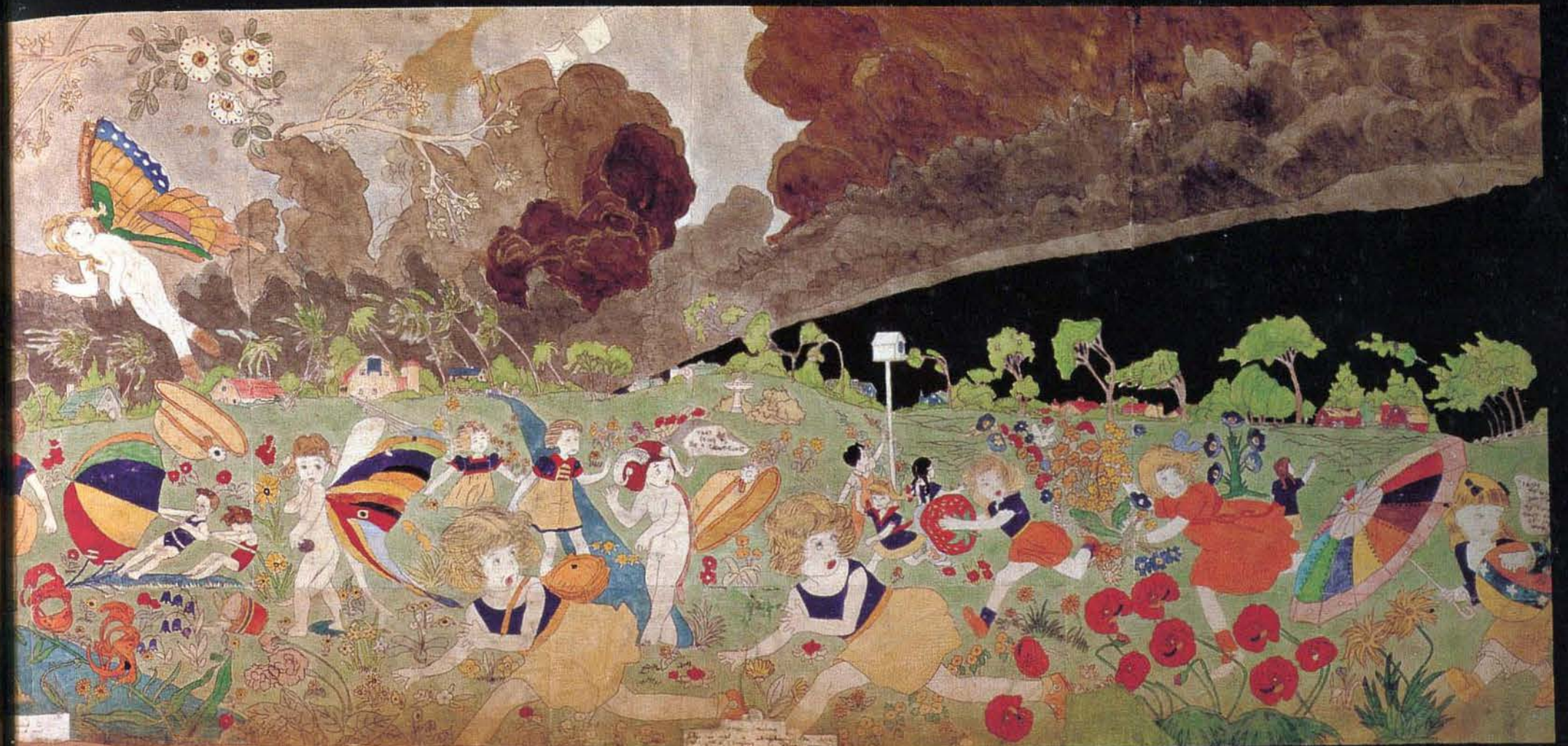
These elaborate compositions have been called into existence purely to provide Darger with an excuse for piling beauty on beauty in a moving depiction of his ideal child world. But, while initially they can appear to be less dark, less tormented, there is in all of them an impossible dreamlike atmosphere. A gentle melancholy seems to possess these visions of an innocent world inhabited exclusively by children. While they may well reflect Darger's more tranquil emotional state after the writing of *The Realms*, with their dark skies and frequent references to approaching storms, they also anticipate the destructive tornadoes which would ultimately take possession of his final work, *The History of My Life*. Outbreaks of destructive rage remained a possibility to the end of his life; an approaching storm always lurked on his internal horizon. Lost in a world of little girls, an idyll more dreamed of than real, Darger was never far from violence or chaos.



6.17

Henry Darger

West. Running from a violent line squall [unreadable]
The flower didn't grow bent sideways or otherwise as seems
in this picture. The wind is tossing them back and forth.
Storm brewing, this is not a strawberry the little girl is carrying.



It comes from a paradise tree. Collage-drawing. 30 x 125 in.
Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. Inv. 9444 (recto). ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

Genius is the capacity to discuss imaginary objects as though they were real ones, and indeed to treat them like real ones.

—Novalis¹

THE INVASION OF THE IMAGINATION: Blengins and Other Creatures

The decision to call an entire new species of gigantic and previously non-existent animals into being would seem to imply the activity of a God somehow dissatisfied with his initial creation, or faced with urgent and unanticipated problems in the Realms of the Unreal. The unexpected appearance and active participation in The Realms of a range of creatures known collectively as "Blengiglomenean serpents," or "Blengins," demands explanation, necessitating a detailed inquiry into their nature and function in the story. More important, since Darger invariably lurks behind God as "creator" of this alternate reality, we will also want to obtain insight into their function in his inner world. What psychological necessity summoned these creatures of his imagination into existence?

In attempting to account for the mysterious beauty and goodness of the Vivian girls we have seen how Darger subtly introduced veiled references to the supernatural. Their endless heroic deeds and unexplained invulnerability carried his history of the great war between evil adults and helpless children over the edge into pure fantasy. However, it is the delightful invention of the Blengiglomenean serpents that permits God to oppose monstrous evil with overwhelming strength, allowing Darger at the same time to introduce an element of playful irrationality and humor into the world of *The Realms*. Through the fantastic activities of the Blengiglomenean creatures his epic adventure is raised to the level of mythology.

While there are, as we will see, an almost overwhelming variety of types of Blengins, in terms of their physical appearance they fall into two major categories. The majority of the sub-species of Blengins are dragon-like beings whose various body parts derive from a range of animal forms (huge wings, antlers and horns, clawlike appendages, a long snout filled with teeth), attached to the heavy body of an enormously long serpent which commonly stands on four stubby legs. The second major group of these creatures is unique in bringing together human and animal forms, most frequently a human head, trunk and arms, combined with a hybrid animal body and serpent tail. Much later, these more nearly human Blengins come to possess a complete child's body, equipped with ram's horns, a short but powerful tail, and richly ornamented wings. It is these anthropomorphic Blengins which are all but omnipresent in the pictorial compositions of Darger's later years.

In creating these dragon-like beasts (they are not dragons, which are only imaginary, but "creatures of flesh and blood"), Darger revealed his childlike and playful side. He delighted in creating wildly imaginative names for them. While he emphasized the extraordinary beauty and gentleness of these creatures, their chief characteristic is the tendency for their behavior to alternate between mild-mannered and protective, and fierce and dangerous. But, though they are capable of extremes of ferocity and violence, their appearance in *The Realms* is usually an indication that the reader can relax and even begin to smile. Despite their enormous size and power (never really evident in the drawings), their violent confrontations with the Glandelinians, while deadly, are never monstrous or sadistic. In their interactions with the children their kitten-like behavior can be readily characterized as cute.

Blengins are cave dwellers, endowed with powerful wings which enable them to fly. Originating, for the most part, on islands in the McWhirthian Seas (the Catherine Isles, the Boyking Islands, and particularly the Blengiglomenean Islands, after which they were named), they are powerful swimmers. "They are the best divers that ever was seen, and they can stay under water for a long time without needing to come up to get air, and even in the greatest depths they can see for miles."² Their appearance in *The Realms* is frequently signaled by the emergence of a huge head with saucer-like eyes from the depths of an underground lake or flooded plain.

Darger informs us that both male and female Blengins exist, and attempts to explain the subtleties of distinguishing between them, without much success. The purely animal hybrids possess no overt sexual characteristics. Differences in tail or talons serve only to indicate whether a Blengin is venomous or not. While baby Blengins occasionally appear in the story, and on very rare occasions in the pictures, one of the unique characteristics of these creatures (particularly evident in those with child bodies) is that though they grow larger they show no signs of aging.

In that some Blengins possess the ability to understand and, more rarely, to use human speech, they manifest disturbing and puzzling similarities to human beings. "Their habits are almost human in many cases except that they do not live in houses or do the work that human people do."³ It is their idealized human psychological characteristics which make these beasts both mysterious and immensely attractive. Their physical strength is matched by the intensity of their emotions, in particular their overwhelmingly strong propensity to love. Darger emphasizes that their love for children, especially Christian little girls, surpasses that of a mother for its young.

Children to the Blengiglomenean serpents seem to be beings more prettier than flowers, no matter whether the child is good looking or not. To see a child crying makes a Blengiglomenean serpent cry, to see a child injured by a Glandelinian seems to make a hell enter a Blengiglomenean serpent, and to see a child happy makes the creature work hard to increase the happiness of that child.⁴

The tendency of Blengins not only to protect young children, but to watch over them from high above, may imply that Darger's limited experience of his own mother (as well as his later fantasies about her existence in heaven) underlies the invention of these gentle but powerful animals. He certainly stressed that female Blengins are the most fierce and dangerous. On the other hand, the ethical nature of these creatures is easily seen as an embodiment of many of Darger's own moral values. It comes as a surprise to learn that Blengins are aware of the existence of God, are uniquely friendly to Christians, and are actively opposed to their enemies the atheistic Glandelinians.

... and what was God's purpose in putting these creatures upon the land was the other question asked. Always these creatures who lived in the christian countries proved to be the best loving creatures that God had ever created in this story.⁵

Concealed within each Blengiglomenean creature is, unmistakably, an idealized Henry Darger.

As we read the various accounts of Blengin behavior it becomes apparent that they were invented largely in order to interact with the children, and to interfere with or revenge their mistreatment by evil adults. In seemingly hopeless situations of violence, children are often rescued by Blengins functioning as a *deus ex machina*, plunging down from the sky and imposing order or justice. As we will see, the final resolution of the Glandco-Abbieannian war is directly linked with the existence and activity of the Blengins, who function on behalf of a tolerant but ultimately vengeful God. Ceaselessly circling high in the sky, they are aware of all that is occurring below.

"Hanson in his earlier days has seen the skies so thick with them, every evening, that sometimes darkness came quicker on account of their shutting out the light; and at the real night time, they were so thick in the sky that if all the billions of stars would be falling, or shooting through the sky, they could never make a more brilliant sight."⁶

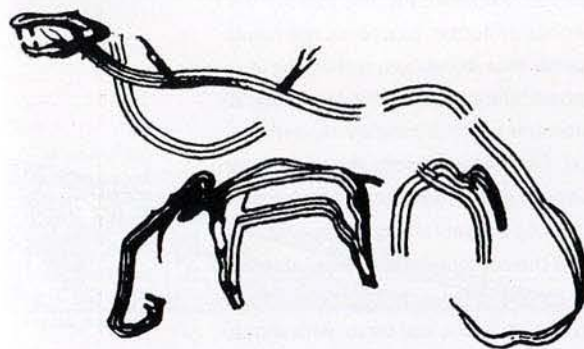
Darger's genius resided, in part, in his astonishing invention of precise detail, and in the density of his imaginative creation. "Life piled on life were not enough." This is particularly evident in his account of the function of the Blengiglomenean eye. He is struck by the fact that the creatures are able to see over an amazing range of territory as well as in microscopic detail, what he refers to as "the combined extent and minuteness of their vision."

No matter how high the Blengiglomenean serpent may be flying in the sky, probably even beyond the highest clouds ever known, they can with their keen and piercing eye night and day sweep the plains below, even to the horizon. The combined extent and minuteness of their vision, often includes not merely towns, villages, districts, and cities, but countries and even kingdoms in its most vast circuit, at the same time piercing the uttermost depths, of gulfs, forests, the maze of swamps, and the intricacies of lawns and meadows, so as to discover every moving object, even the sly and stealthy Glandelinian soldiers who constitute children for their prey.

He explains their astonishing capacity to see in the dark as resulting from the fact that "at night their eyes flash fire like search lights."⁸ While Blengins may be expected to see many extraordinary things as they circle in the sky, it seems that their essential task involves watching out for Glandelinians up to no good, and protecting children by keeping them always in sight. On the one hand, he is describing the visual acuity of God who, dwelling "beyond the highest clouds ever known," sees all things, but in particular the actions of those who would commit evil deeds. On the other hand, it is the tender, but all seeing eyes of a mother watching over her child, "through the intricacies of lawns and meadows," which he is perhaps remembering. Somewhere in this fantasy of Blengins circling high above is a vision of his own mother, long dead, but fiercely protective, her searchlight eyes burning in the darkness.

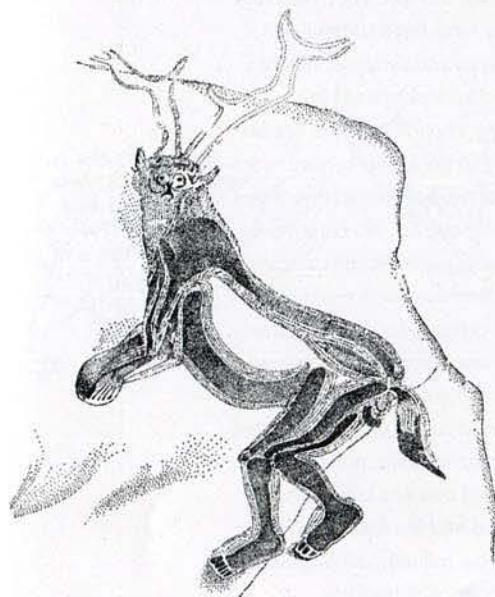
7.1

La Baume-Latrone (Gard). "Serpent and elephant antiquus." Reddish clay outlines on rock face. Drawing by E. Drouot, 1953, reproduced in S. Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*, p. 308.



7.2

Les Trois Freres. "The Sorcerer." Painting and engraving on stone. Drawing after Breuil, reproduced in S. Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*, p. 504.



On the Origins of Blengins, Dragons, Angels, and Other Imaginary Beasts

The urgent need to invent animals unknown to nature is by no means unique to Darger. Religion and religious art, throughout the ages and in all parts of the world, have been invaded with astonishing frequency by strange beasts originating exclusively in the mind of man. The recurrence of such fantastic animals throughout the whole of mankind's cultural evolution obviously implies a profound and persistent human need. One of the earliest examples, an enormous serpent depicted in the cavern of Baume-Latrone, can be dated convincingly to the Aurignacian Period (c. 30,000 BC) (7.1). This three-meter-long snake equipped with the head and fangs of a carnivore, while certainly unknown to Darger, would have seemed both familiar and acceptable to him as a variety of animal-form Blengin.⁹

Faced with the task of creating impressive and varied representatives of a new species, Darger relied on methods employed for this purpose throughout history — the piecing together of non-existent hybrid animals from the body parts of all sorts of familiar creatures: reptiles, mammals, birds, even insects. While his procedure was traditional, it is worth inquiring whether the impulses underlying his creative activity were in any way similar to the obscure and varied motives which inspired the invention of hybrid forms in earlier civilizations. Does the impulse to create a monster whose head is crowned with reindeer antlers and the ears of a wolf, matched with the legs and body of a man, the front paws of a bear, the tail of a horse (a being rendered intensely impressive by the presence of two large staring eyes), have any

connection with the drive underlying Darger's creation of a "horrible looking Crimean Gazook"¹⁰ (7.2)? Does the fact that many of the human-bodied hybrids of prehistory are depicted with an erect phallus have any bearing on Darger's addition of male genitals to his otherwise female-bodied Blengins? Our spontaneous tendency to reply to these questions with a firm "No!" may derive from our inclination to want to see Darger's Blengiglomenean serpents as light-hearted creations of an imagination at play, creatures motivated by drives far less serious in origin than those which inspired early man working in the darkness of underground caves. We forget that Darger encountered his Blengins far beneath the earth in volcanic caverns overwhelmingly more impressive than those of prehistory.

... they were in a narrow tunnel which terminated in a narrow steep abyss. They were almost terrified, and though it was utterly dark, fumes and intense heat arose from this dark gulf. And if it was not for a peculiar draught that passed through the tunnel the deadly fumes would have overcome them ... The heat was terrific, and they again retraced their steps only to come upon an exceedingly long ledge, descending downward, below and down perhaps a thousand feet or more, and they beheld a lake of sizzling lava. They gazed upon the blasting, hissing lake in dismay, and they realized that the ledge was as slippery as ice, proceeding downward running into the sea of lava so far below them ... From the lava came the sound of hissing, the roar of explosions being like the heaviest cannonading, the steam puffing from the lava

surface in balloon shape clouds with a deafening roar. The floor of the cave seemed to tremble, the steam and the heat over the lake was unbearable, and the fumes from the molten lava appalling. At one side of the ledge they were on yawned a blacker opening and exploring it they saw that it was floorless, and that it was a large yawning gulf, it being dark as pitch inside ... They saw many queer openings in the wall, towering high above them, shaped like all kinds of doors and windows, which of course were the openings to other labyrinthian passages ... On they continued, and on and on, until at last they came to another cave. It seemed, however, to be a tunnel, a cave which slanted downward steeply, and following it a certain distance, they saw at the ending of the tunnel a chasm, which seemed to have no bottom. They retraced their steps slowly and carefully, and soon to their surprise found themselves on the other side of the great lake of molten lava which at this point was in furious waves; rushing and splashing and exploding in violent steam blasts, in all directions, a worse scene than that of a stormy ocean ... Far to the left thousands of tons of lava, nay millions of tons of lava, were pouring into the molten sea with a roar like a thousand cannon. Cave after cave, tunnel after tunnel, they passed through. They were still lost in the labyrinthian caverns. Finally they stumbled into the entrance of another huge cavern, which was fully lighted to a lurid redness, and were startled at what they saw. Five extraordinary monsters, more

huge than the most immense dragons ever dreamed of, lay coiled up asleep with their enormous wings spread over their huge bodies. Their backs were covered with golden scales but armored, the underparts were deep purple of hue, and their heads though not a bit ugly looked frightfully venomous. They were really all asleep, but not far from them were smaller ones which raised their beautiful but venomous heads, and looked in all directions with fiery eyes as large as cups, which glared like radiant searchlights. "Gazooks," whispered Evans."¹¹

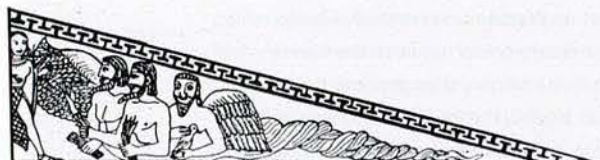
In a very real sense Darger's mysterious hybrids derive less from freewheeling zoological invention than from idiosyncratic and compulsive theological speculation. In the cave of his mind he was encountering beings, spirits and demons, manifestations of the divine and the monstrous, which existed well outside of the borders of conventional religion. In terms of their immense size and their capacity for violence, Darger's Blengins reveal both his quest for power, and his intense feelings of powerlessness.

Classical Hybrids

Inherent in the evolution of religion is a tendency for mankind's gods to become increasingly anthropomorphic. Paradoxically, this move in the direction of gods of human form does not result in the disappearance of hybrids; rather, these beings of mixed human and animal form migrate out to the obscure edges of religious and mythological belief. Ceasing to be gods they now serve as expressions of the demonic and the monstrous. In a fragment of pedimental sculpture, which once adorned the old temple of Athena, atop the Acropolis in Athens, Nereus god of the sea combines human head, arms, and torso, with wings, and the powerful body of a massive snake; it is strikingly like a Dortherian Blengin¹² (7.3). Although Darger would probably have been unfamiliar with such esoteric images and symbols, he does mention a number of classical hybrids in connection with Blengins, in particular, the Cretan Minotaur, the chimera, and the snake-headed hydra. While he occasionally arrived at formal inventions reminiscent of early religious art, his creative process was in fact moving in a direction completely opposite to that which we have been examining. Living in the twentieth century, he was for some reason driven to move away from purely anthropomorphic spiritual beings. Inspired to create hybrid animals on behalf of his Christian God, he invented monsters which were, paradoxically, not evil but overwhelmingly good; not demons but creatures strangely allied with God and the Catholic church. In so doing, he reveals his magnificent originality of thought and independence of tradition.

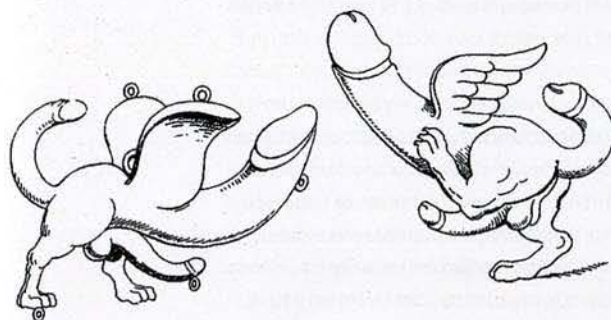
7.3

Old Temple of Athena, Acropolis, Athens. "Nereus, God of the Sea." Drawing detail. Sculptural pediment, painted limestone. Acropolis Museum, Athens.



7.4

Winged Phallus, classical Roman. Reproduced in Richard Payne Knight and Thomas Wright, *A History of Phallic Worship*, reprint (New York, 1992).



Greek art includes a host of winged human figures, but those closest in form to Darger's human-bodied Blengins are the *keres*, or human ghosts, depicted as small, winged adolescents. Darger would have been familiar with them, of course, in their later Christian manifestation as angels. Completely unfamiliar to him would have been the tendency prevalent all over Greece to imagine the dead, and particularly the angry or offended dead (*Erinyes*), in snake form. Among many primitive peoples the snake, inhabitant of the underworld, is regarded as the ghost of a dead man, usually an ancestor.¹³ It may prove worth inquiring whether Darger's Blengins, invariably winged and equipped with a serpent's tail, retain any of this symbolic connection with death. And it would not be as contradictory as might first appear to explore possible ties with another powerful symbol commonly encountered in the classical world, the winged phallus, with its obvious links with sexuality and the phenomena of arousal and erection¹⁴ (7.4). While Darger's naively innocent, snake-tailed Blengins are invariably dangerous and commonly venomous, they also possess, as we will see, an unusual capacity to use their bite as a means of bestowing invincibility, partial immortality, and profound sensual pleasure on their equally innocent child victims. It is in this unique, and curiously sexual phenomenon that we will discover the most intimate and secret links between the Blengiglomenean serpents and the Vivian girls.

Christian Hybrids

As a deeply religious Roman Catholic, Darger would have been especially familiar with hybrid animals encountered within the context of Christianity. The fundamental source behind his purely animal-form Blengins is unmistakably the bat-winged Christian dragon, invariable expression of evil, and a traditional symbol of the devil and his host of fallen angels.¹⁵ Behind his Blengins of human form lurk the traditional angels of Christianity, winged beings occasionally equated with the souls of the innocent dead.

Somewhat less familiar to him would have been the incredible variety of hybrid forms which crept into the dark corners and up onto the remote towers of Gothic cathedrals. That Darger knew of at least one of these monstrous beings, the famous gargoyle from the tower of Notre-Dame in Paris, is revealed by his use of its image on the flag of the Omarian Curdes of Glandelinia¹⁶ (see illustrations 4.5, 4.6).

Had he known of their existence, he would have taken particular delight in the remarkably inventive and varied hybrids which occupy the margins of medieval manuscripts, because of their astonishing similarity to Blengins. Removed from their ecclesiastical setting and massively enlarged, they would make the transition from the pages of sacred books to the illustrations of *The Realms* without difficulty. It is in the "Christian hybrids" of the Middle Ages that we certainly come closest to feeling an identity of concept and of motivation underlying the creative activity of the medieval sculptor or illuminator, and the obscure and magical inventions of Henry Darger as illustrator of *In the Realms of the Unreal*.

Tradition and the Outsider

Darger's hybrids are an utterly personal creation shared with no one. The Outsider artist elaborates a singular and intensely private mythology, the beings he gives birth to derive from subjective forces stirring within an individual psyche. No attempt is made to ensure, or even consider, their relevance to any other individual or group. For this reason, any attempt to establish points of similarity between historical images and the idiosyncratic creations of the Outsider must be undertaken with extreme tentativeness. In many cases we are examining the creations of individuals who, lacking even rudimentary education or exposure to culture, have no awareness of even the most familiar historical myths and images. Nevertheless, the Outsider artist, however isolated he may be, does not create in a historical vacuum. Inevitably, in giving birth to an alternate world, cultural influences from the surrounding society creep into even the most deeply private creations, with curious parallels with ancient beliefs and images occasionally emerging.

Darger, who had an elementary school education, certainly was at least superficially aware of classical mythology. His devotion to Catholic ritual and belief ensured considerable familiarity with concepts and images forming the essential core of Christian religious and artistic tradition. However, it is evident that this shared body of symbols and beliefs was seriously insufficient in meeting his far from conventional and profoundly personal needs. As a result, he was driven to create new symbols, new images and beliefs, embodying and to some extent satisfying his overwhelmingly intense, not to say pathological, intra-psychic needs. The Outsider is an outsider, in part, because he is

unable to accept or make use of the shared myths, the common structure of beliefs and symbols, offered by his society. The powerful compulsive drives underlying the creation of a true alternate world testify to the inadequacy of external social and cultural supports, and to a consequent withdrawal from shared experience. The creation of the Blengiglomenean serpents represents a dramatic instance of such a process.

In introducing so unique a creature into his other world, Darger considered the problem of their origin.¹⁷

The origin of Blengiglomenean serpents is a mystery to all nations of the world, in this story. They have existed as long as anyone of the human race of the Angelinian world can remember ... As far as found out in the discoveries of the writings of people, as in the earliest part of the year 100, they were known as great serpents that may have been descendants of great dragons of old that had been existing before that period, but then this writing could not be proved or confirmed. For though a species of dragons, these great Blengins were never known to be dragons. Dragons in size are fairies compared to these creatures, and would be as helpless to them as a fly in a man's hand.¹⁸

He unconsciously acknowledges here his debt to conventional dragons while at the same time insisting on fundamental differences. As we come to know the Blengins, their psychology and behavior, these differences become more than apparent.

Even when direct borrowing can be demonstrated in Outsider Art, the use the borrowed material is put to leads in completely unanticipated directions. The radical reinterpretation of traditional images and ideas reflects the influence of drives and modes of understanding which tend to deprive borrowed historical material of any connection with its original context and meaning. Traditional symbols are adapted in this way, to play an unexpected part in a totally new creation. For example, despite formal parallels between the various forms of animal-shaped Blengins and the dragon of Christian legend, the loss of the symbolic connection with evil, and its replacement by the extraordinary goodness, devotion, and capacity for love of these singular creatures, reveals a fundamental reinterpretation of what was once a dragon. Even the capacity for violence which they occasionally demonstrate is put to morally admissible use.

Similarly, the possible connection between the winged, human-bodied Blengins and conventional angels only serves to emphasize their essential difference. The unexpected addition of enormous ram's horns and a dragon's tail provides these pseudo-angels with an unlimited capacity for utilizing their murderous rage in the chastisement of evil adults. Darger was perfectly correct in insisting upon the animal nature of these creatures of his imagination. "Now the Blengiglomenean creatures are not spirits or neither are they anything magic or anything else that may be imagined about them ... They are animal creatures of flesh and blood, the same as any other."¹⁹

In examining the obscure, spontaneous, and deeply subjective inventions embodied in psychotic delusions, hallucinations, or cosmogonic systems, or in the alternate worlds of Outsiders, we occasionally come upon impressive, but seemingly fortuitous parallels with historical material, mythological ideas and images, which cannot be accounted for on the basis of direct influence. Strikingly, these parallels often involve symbolic content derived from earlier strata of human history, with material surfacing that is utterly remote from contemporary understanding and experience. Because of our inability to relate with any degree of intimacy to the world of animals, the hybrid being represents an obvious example of an obscure symbol whose many meanings now lie well outside of our experience.²⁰ To the extent that these parallels are more than mere coincidence, they may imply the emergence, in extremis, of primitive motivation and drives still present, though usually repressed, in the human psyche, drives which may surface in the irrational and compulsive creations of the Outsider artist.²¹ In seeking to understand Blengins, it is useful to realize that there was undoubtedly a time when their existence was still in flux, when their appearance and behavior had not yet been arrived at with any certainty by Darger's activity as an artist. It is highly probable that the Blengins emerged, not in the depths of human history, but in the obscure early phases of Darger's own life, and that they were, initially, the fantastic inventions of a traumatic childhood and adolescence.

The "Treatise on Blengins" and Its Pictorial Illustrations

Blengiglomenean serpents may well have existed in Darger's mind for a very long time before he sought to give them more precise and concrete form. When they did emerge it was through the magic of words, with these overwhelmingly huge and powerful beasts first taking shape in his writings. Only later did he seek to embody their reality in visual terms, with child Blengins as active participants in the huge pictorial illustrations of *The Realms*. On rare occasions, however, the sequence may have been reversed, with simple graphic images preceding, and perhaps inspiring, the written descriptions.

Pictorially, as we have seen, two radically distinct images of Blengins emerged from his imagination at different times: winged creatures having the form of animals, and obviously related to dragons; and, later, the fully human-bodied form, a winged child equipped with horns and a tail. To add to the confusion, the earlier dragon-form Blengins include among their number types which have partial human bodies (a head, or head, trunk, and arms), combined with the hybrid body of a massive mammal, and a long reptilian tail (7.5).

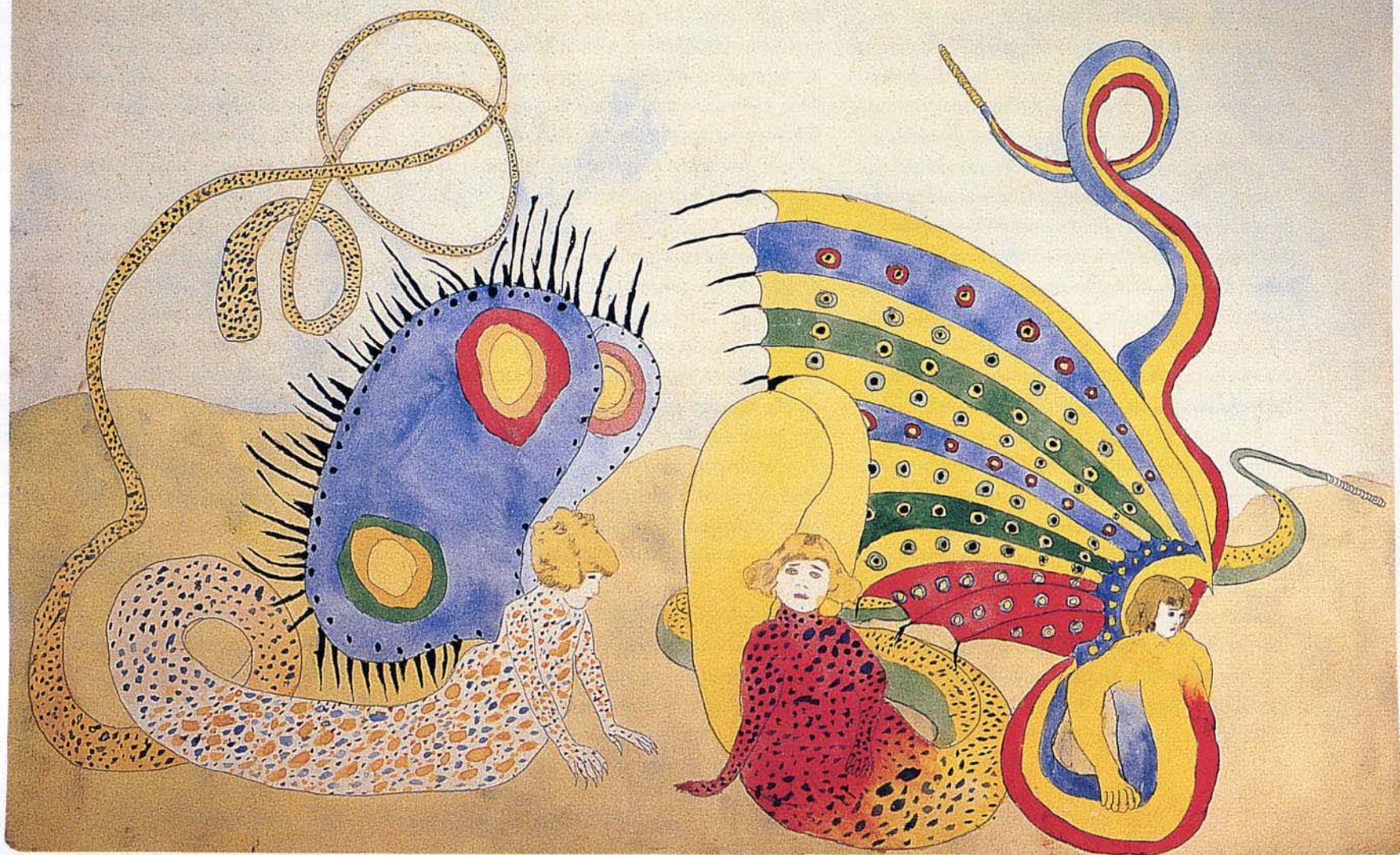
It is possible that the two dramatically dissimilar types represent distinct evolutionary stages in the emergence of Blengins in Darger's mind and art. It appears fairly certain that the dragon-like form came first, and they certainly conform more closely to the Blengins described in the writings. However, relatively few of these dragon-like beasts appear in the large compositions which Darger began to paint after completing the writing of much of *The*

Realms. The fully human-formed Blengins, which are regularly depicted in these large compositions, were created later, and can be dated no earlier than the mid-1940s. We will, therefore, postpone consideration of these child Blengins until later. For the moment, let us examine the origins and early representations, both written and pictorial, of the dragon-like form of the reptile.

IN VOLUME ONE of *The Realms*, an extremely lengthy and detailed exposition on Blengins is included as chapter four. Beginning on page 29, and running for twenty closely reasoned pages, is an essay entitled "What Are Blengiglomenean Serpents?" An encyclopedic presentation of all types of the creatures then known, this "Treatise on Blengins" would seem to indicate with certainty that both animal and partially human forms of Blengin date at least as far back as the beginning of the composition of *The Realms* (c.1911), and probably well before.²² As we have seen, however, the early chapters in volume one of *The Realms*, including the "Treatise on Blengins," were probably not written during these formative years. The most that can be said with certainty is that these chapters, and the "Treatise on Blengins," were in existence prior to the binding of the books in 1932.

Existing alongside of the written treatise on the nature of Blengiglomenean serpents is a set of approximately forty, single-sheet illustrations of the animals, the "Pictures of Blengins."²³ Although this set of pictures cannot be dated, the group as a whole appears to have been created during one relatively brief phase.²⁴ This "outburst" of Blengin illustration seems to have been directly connected to the writing of the "Treatise on Blengins" in

YOUNG- REBBONNA DORTHEREANS.
 BLENQ INS -
 CATHERINE ISLES.
 FEMALES ONE A WHIP-LASH-TAIL.



7.5 left
Henry Darger
 Young Rebbonna
 Dorthereans, Blengins
 — Catherine Isles.
 Females. One a Whip-
 Lash-Tail. 18 7/8 x
 24 in. ©1998 Kiyoko
 Lerner.

7.6 below

Henry Darger

Eagle Headed Blengin,

Also Spangled Wings

Three Quarters Part

Closed, Non posionious.

16 7/8 x 13 7/8 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



volume one. In several cases, it seems certain that in his written description, Darger was describing, not an imaginary image of a Blengin, but a picture of one which lay on the table before him.²⁵ So frequently does this appear to be the case that a real possibility exists that the set of "Pictures of Blengins" was created before the writing of the "Treatise" or, at least, that the text and pictures were created simultaneously. An example is provided by the Red Bellied Eagle Headed Blengin (7.6):

The most ferocious kind of Blengin of all are the great Red Bellied Eagle Headed Blengins. When fully open, their spangled wings are about thirteen hundred feet high, and fourteen feet thick, and are striped with all kinds of round yellow dots. The stripes are red and the rest yellow. This creature also has a head and body like an eagle, but also part way like a dragon, and the tail sometimes exceeds ten thousand feet in length, and is about forty feet high. Next to the Roverines and Dorthereans and Rebbonna, they are the biggest and the strongest, but they are more exceedingly ferocious, and no Glandelinians have encountered one of them without fatal results. Some kinds are venomous and other are not. They all have the same color of bodies, though wings vary in hues. They are seen in all countries and islands, excepting the Catherine Isles. Their roar is the same as the Golden Eagle Blengiglomenean creatures.²⁶

In origin, the Red Bellied Eagle Headed Blengin came, not simply from his imagination, but, in part, from the fact that he possessed a picture of an eagle, which he was able to trace and then modify by the curious addition of an enormous reptilian tail. Naturalism was avoided by painting the traced bird bright pink. The inner sections of the wings are indeed "spangled" with yellow dots on a vermillion ground, while the outer sections consist of feathers alternately striped in red and yellow. It is extremely improbable that Darger wrote the description of this form of eagle-headed bird, and then went in search of a suitable picture to trace, or that he systematically followed each detail of his written description in creating a faithful illustration. His working procedure was never so pedantic. His imagination was triggered by the accidental and spontaneous juxtapositions characteristic of his collage-drawing technique and by his intuitive and original choice of colors. He then used writing as a means of adding elements not visible in the drawing: references to specific measurements, to the ferocity, which he never quite succeeded in expressing in drawings of Blengins, to the roaring sound they produce, and to the fact that at least some are venomous. Speaking of another form of Eagle Headed Blengin, the Golden Eagle Pink Tailed Taporean, he explains that its long pink tail, "though it would look short in a picture, is over seventeen thousand feet in length."²⁷ His cat- and dog-headed Blengins, of which there are several kinds, were also dependent for their origin on traced pictures of the foreparts of these animals (7.7).



7.7

Henry Darger

Cat Headed Blengin,

Non-posionious,

Blengiglomenean Is.

13⁷/₈ x 16⁷/₈ in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



7.8

Henry Darger

Spangled Blengin, child
headed. All nations
of christian nature.

13 7/8 x 16 7/8 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Partially human-form Blengins are also introduced in the "Treatise" and in the set of illustrations.

An example is the Praying Rebbonna (7.8).

Even when full grown they are short in length. But, nevertheless, they are very monstrosly just the same and can exceed the length of eight hundred feet. There are eighty feet broad, ninety feet high at the highest part, and have wings extending upward, when fully open, that exceed three hundred feet. They are beautiful to behold, in colors and face, and sometimes exceeds in beautiful appearance the most dainty little girls ever seen. When working their way along the ground, they have a habit of lifting their hands high in the air clasping together as if in the act of praying, and thus is the reason they obtain this kind of name. They are seen frequently in the Blengiglomenean and Boyking Islands, but also they are seen in the Catherine Isles. Some are beautiful in features and complexion even in the males, and no beautiful child in the world can exceed their pretty faces when the creatures are young. Hanson calls them Praying Rebbonnas. Their scales are generally all around the entire body and are all in one color on the body, excepting the face and arms which have a peculiar yellowish tan color.²⁸

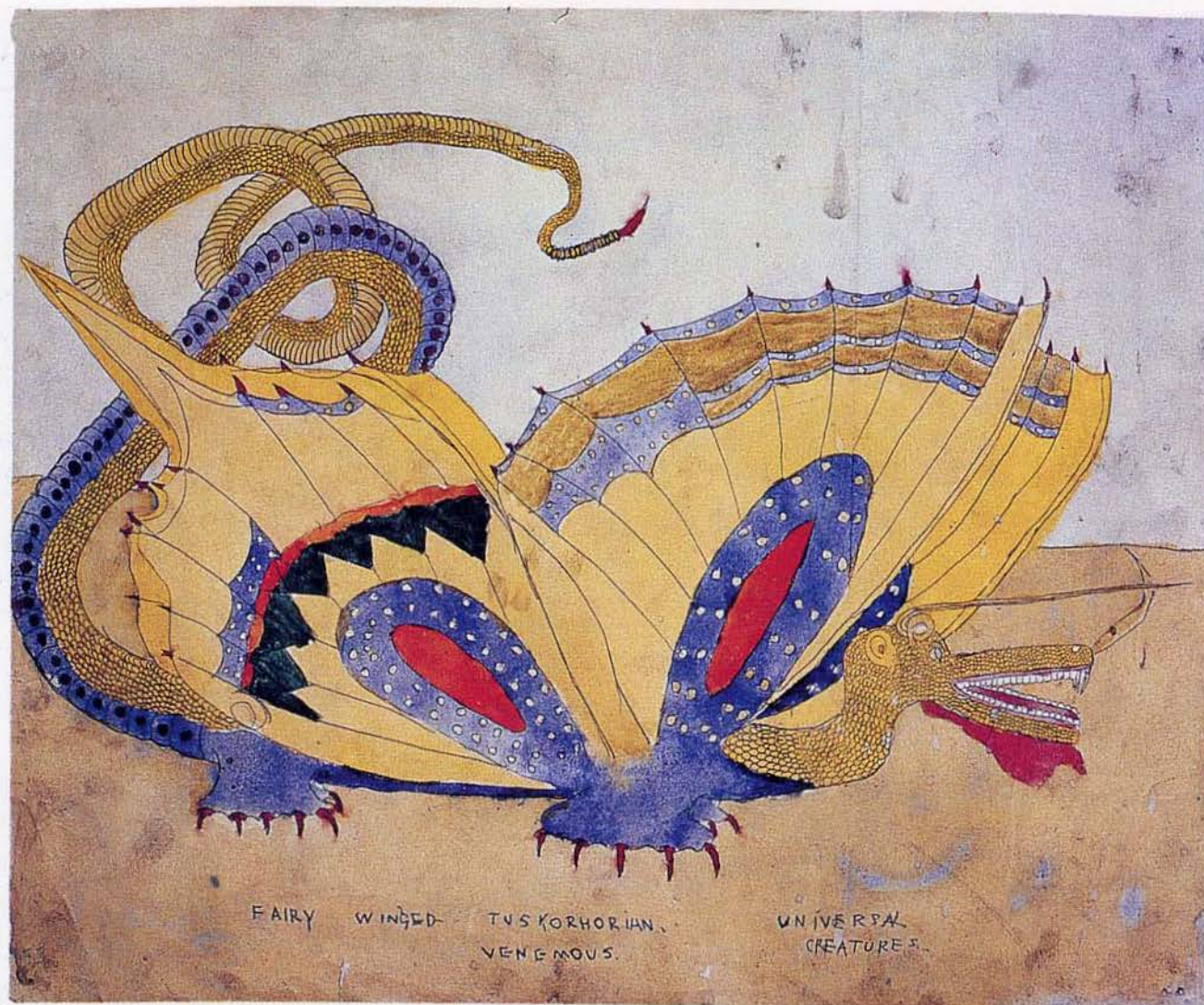
This unexpected image, which perfectly embodies the peculiar religious impulses of the Blengins, was arrived at by tracing a picture of a child at prayer (a subject always enormously attractive to Henry), and then, incongruously but convincingly, adding to it the thick body of a serpent and an enormous set of wings. In his text he struggles to imagine how such a creature could

move along the ground while its hands were raised in prayer. A dense texture of overlapping scales covering all of the lower parts of the body was laboriously applied with a pencil over an undercoat of dull red. The body color, including an attempt at flesh tones, is relatively subdued until, suddenly, the huge pair of wings fills the picture with overwhelmingly intense color, including, once again, spangled yellow dots on a vermillion red ground.

Bodily forms often tend to provide the basis for the name, with the wings being particularly influential in this regard. "So many had wings formed like fairies and butterflies, or like eagles and angels, and also like bats, of many various colors."²⁹ They did so, of course, because Darger's collection contained examples of such wings which could be traced and then attached to the various bodies. He tells us that all Blengins are winged, just as they all have legs.

... they are so swift in running that the fastest express train would be left miles behind if running a race with them, the fastest have been known to run at a speed of eight hundred miles an hour, and fly at a rate of two thousand miles an hour.³⁰

An entire category of these animals, the Tuskorhorian Blengins, is designated as such on the basis of their unique horns, which emerge from the side of the head in a spiral, and then proceed straight forward [7.9].



7.9
Henry Darger
Fairy Winged Tusko-
rhorian, venemous.
Universal Creatures.
16 7/8 x 13 7/8 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The most poisonous of all the Blengiglomenean creatures is the spangled-winged Tuskorhorians with short tails. Their Tuskorhorian horns are long, and the points have a shape like a spear ... They are, however, exceedingly docile, and never have harmed a Glandelinian, except to protect its young, or help children enslaved by the Glandelinians.³¹

Other Blengin types possess huge antlers.

What we are witnessing is a short burst of astonishing creativity, during which Darger was driven to invent endless variations on the theme of the Blengin. Experimental forms emerge on paper as he exploits the unique capacity of the collage-drawing technique to bring together disparate elements to form a true hybrid. He "discovers" the image through drawing it, and then provides it with a name which frequently reflects its design characteristics or its color. Then, slightly later perhaps, he attempts to provide it with a specific character and function by writing about it. The graphic process appears to have involved extreme freedom and a playful delight in invention, which is also observable in the pleasure he obviously took in inventing fantastic names for his creatures. One can readily imagine Darger chuckling to himself with his characteristic "tee-hee" as he thought up terms such as "Freak-Winged Oceanic Malferian," "Handsome Dude Roverine," or "Crimecian Gazook." Depicted only once in the set of "Pictures of Blengins," these very specific types do not occur elsewhere and were not introduced into the large compositions. They seem to have been the product of the explosive, but brief, creative outburst which also produced the "Treatise on Blengins."

It is possible that Darger intended the "Treatise" to reflect the writing style, not of himself, but of General Hanson, who we are constantly reminded is the ultimate authority on Blengins, and the source of the entire system of names and classifications. Perhaps it is Hanson who should be blamed for the slightly labored quality which creeps into the written treatise, with its somewhat repetitious description of details of size, color, location, and function of the various types of Blengin. Nevertheless, displaying the organizational skill of a great general, he managed to keep track of a very considerable variety of animals and their characteristics. It is by no means easy to follow the encyclopedic nosological system he invented, nor was he always consistent. He was tempted by superlatives, so that each entry tends to involve the largest, fiercest, and most beautiful of all Blengins. In these descriptions one senses an obsessional quality, and as the lists, and the Blengins, grow longer and longer one wonders where it will end.³²

In that General Hanson traced his lifelong involvement with Blengins back to childhood experiences shared with his father, it is not improbable that Darger's fantasies about the species had similar origins.³³ The Blengins seem to have evolved throughout Darger's early life, with their various forms reflecting the developmental and psychosexual stages through which he passed, or failed to pass. Certainly some of the characteristics of Blengins derive from the later experiences of adolescence, revealing something of his life in institutions, with the terrible feelings of helplessness and rage such places invariably provoke.

Blengins in The Realms

The Blengiglomenean serpents attain their full richness of form, function, and personality only in the written narrative of *The Realms*. It is through their interaction with human beings that we really come to know them. As the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that they have been called into existence, not on their own account, but in order to respond, with violence or love, to human adults and children. As these beautiful creatures surface in one volume after another, their mystical significance is slowly unveiled: their deep attraction to the Christian cause and, at the story's end, their ultimate function as the source of divine retribution. Only very reluctantly does Darger allow us to glimpse the obscure sexual activity which connects them mysteriously to the supernatural nature of the Vivian girls.

Although they put in an appearance in the story only on rare occasions, their spontaneous and invariably surprising emergence, from the darkness of a cavern or the depths of flood waters, always signals the beginning of a delightfully irrational, warm-hearted, and usually humorous, interlude. While the majority of Blengins in the written narrative are of animal form, and vaguely dragon-like, from the very beginning they reveal traces of human form, function, and feeling. Much of this largely unconscious process of change, in the direction of greater humanness, may have taken place in Darger's fantasy life, well before the writing of *The Realms* began. The earliest written descriptions of Blengins can already be seen to embody Henry's deepest human needs and longings. Powerful and obstructed sexual and aggressive drives slowly emerging in his psyche

necessitated the slow transformation of the initially dragon-like beasts into beautiful, winged little girls, with elaborate and dangerous horns and tails. The Blengins' intense capacity for love and hate, their gentleness, and their destructive rage are Darger's own.

Often he appears to have been as surprised as we are by some new aspect of Blengiglomenean character or accomplishment. "They have the gift of a human voice and knowledge bestowed by God, which we had never known of before, and at first when they spoke to us, we did not know what to make of it."³⁴ The Vivian girls possess unusual knowledge of Blengins, as well as a uniquely warm and friendly relationship with them. Through their frequent discussions about these animals we constantly acquire new information:

"The female hatches young ones as quick as a chicken or hen hatches young chickens," said Hettie, "I've seen a mother Blengiglomenean serpent have a hundred full grown ones within four years." "But what about this one? Ain't he a male?" "You was making a mistake all the time calling it a 'he,'" said Daisy, "It's a female. I can tell from the wings. In females the wings are more numerous in colors, the head is girlish in appearance, and the body is more slender. I've heard females are more ferocious against wicked enemies than males. At your testimony anyway, it attacked without warning. Males would not do that."³⁵

Although Darger appears to conceive of Blengins as reptiles hatched from eggs, I know of no depiction of a Blengiglomenean egg, nor is there a representation of Blengins being hatched.

Darger's deep love for these monstrous creatures of his own invention is comparable to the preoccupation of normal children, especially boys, with dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals, monstrous reptiles with names and characteristics oddly similar to Blengins.³⁶ While children seem initially to be attracted by the huge size, tremendous strength, and dangerous character of these safely extinct beasts, there is also a contrasting tendency to humanize them, to turn once dangerous animals into amusing and harmless playmates and special friends who are at the same time big, strong, magical, and often frightening to adults.³⁷ Could Henry, in his childhood in the 1890s, already have been interested in dinosaurs? He may have been taken by his father to the Columbian Museum of Chicago which had been established in 1893 during the world's Columbian Exposition held in that city. There he could have seen impressive life-size skeletal reconstructions of various prehistoric beasts, models which continued on view through the first decades of the twentieth century. However, he makes no mention of any early contact with dinosaurs in his writings, preferring to compare Blengins to dragons.³⁸

In inventing his winged serpents more or less out of whole cloth, Darger manifests both the scientific preoccupations of adults confronting the unknown, and the playful humanizing tendencies seen in the monsters created by children.³⁹ Delightful examples of Darger's desire to make Blengins both human and lovable are to be found in accounts of their life-saving activities during the great floods.

A young Blengiglomenean creature was swimming bravely with a score of children whom it rescued on its back, when he came to the second story porch, opening off a second story porch floor on which there were many refugees. The latter caught him by the wing, and with the children still clinging to his back, he slowly floundered onto the porch. It was stifling hot outside and the water was steaming, and the creature promptly bolted inside. Here he remained a pet with his rescuers until the house caught fire. This time all of the occupants fled on his back, the creature saving them all.

Another Blengiglomenean creature stood for hours clear of the flood on top of a broad brick wall. Presently a number of half drowned children came floating by. The creature dived in, fished them from the water, and swam to shore. The people on shore gave him a good feed.

Two other Blengiglomenean creatures were deliberately granted refuge in a big hotel, and friends or sympathizing people brought feed and water to them by boat. The flooded country was full of such stories, and such sights.⁴⁰

It is through intimacy with the Vivian girls and their friends that an occasional Blengin takes on a distinct personality and, in one case, a personal name. The most fully characterized Blengin is their friend Rover, a "Handsome Dude Roverine," who is often to be found lying among the roses in their garden.

"It looks familiar," said Violet. "Can it really be the one we saved from the Glan-delinian dragon, and who killed that wicked Legree who kicked it in the face?" "It's the very same Blengiglomenean creature," answered Hanson, "I discovered it aboding place this morning. Near our garden and close to our house as you know there is within view a beautiful hill covered with grass and beautiful foliage and trees. Well, I was going up the hill to capture a rabbit which I thought we could use for a good dinner, when the earth gave way under my feet and precipitated me down into a beautiful cave, not formed by nature but some creature's beautiful design ... I decided to explore it. One part was darkness, probably an unoccupied part, and as I preceded cautiously, I heard a slight noise, and looking toward the direction I saw two glaring eyes looking steadily at me. I, not knowing what it was, decided to draw my rifle and fire, when I realized all of a sudden that a wild cat's eyes is never so large and that its gleam is never so searchlight in appearance. I then shouted 'Who are you with the glaring eyes?' As there was no answer, and as it still stared at me, I lit a match and saw to my surprise a creature that was just the one you little girls had been missing. It immediately recognized me and came up, and as I retraced my steps, it followed me as fast as I went, emitting sounds so beautiful and touching that I was touched and couldn't resist the temptation of stroking its head.

"It had, while we were away, dug its own cavern and so kept itself there, and never left us." They now approached the Blengiglomenean creature which was lying down, but as they drew up to it, it lifted its beautiful head, and looked at them steadily once more.⁴¹

Given their intense attraction for human children, the possibility of adopting Blengins as pets is occasionally considered.

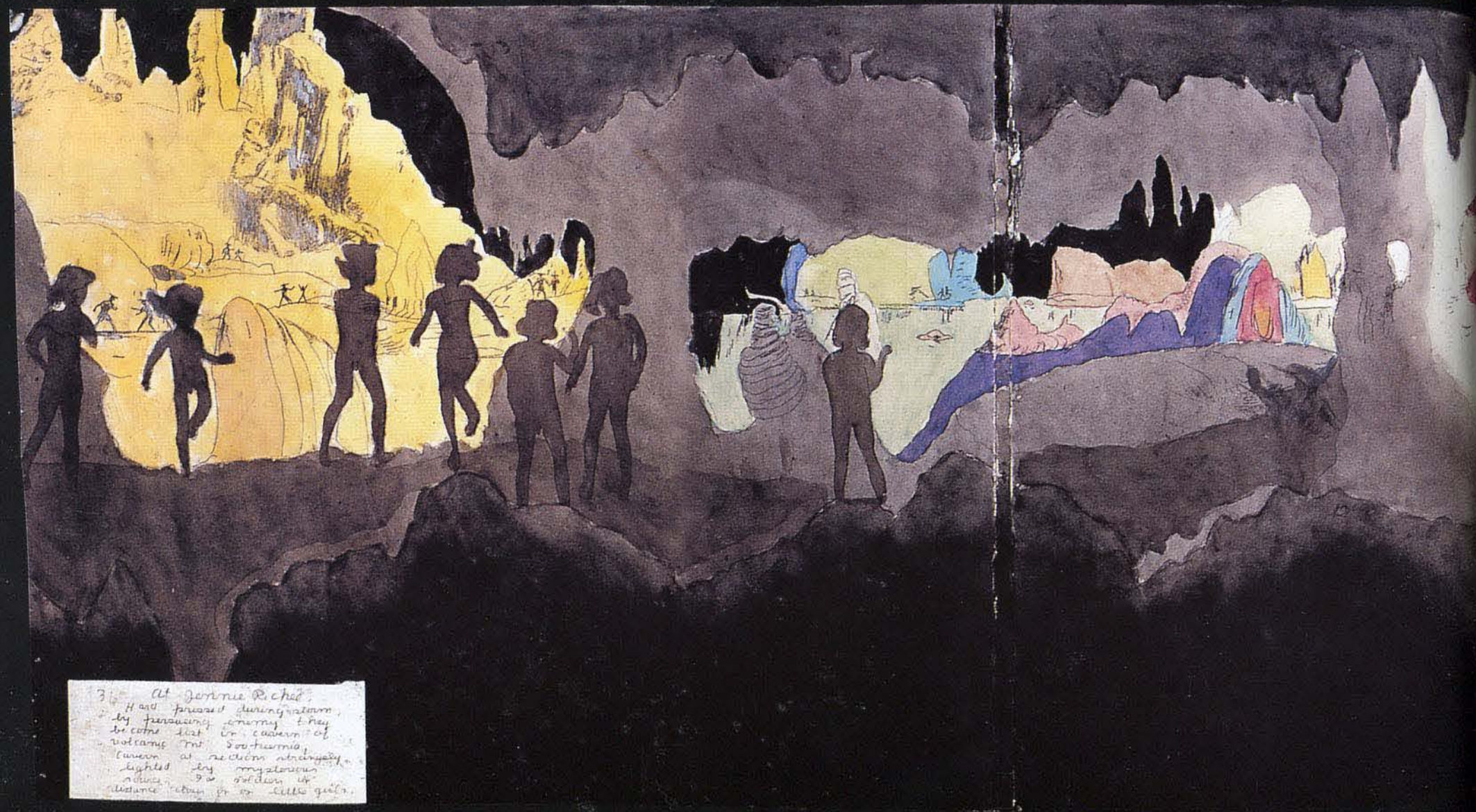
"Well, he is a good guardian for you little girls," said Evans, "No one can do you any harm while he is with us. If Rover would permit us to keep him, we could raise him and then, when he is full grown, the very devils of hell could not harm you little girls."⁴²

Much later, in the collage-drawings, the Blengins become far too human to be adopted as pets, appearing instead as the playmates and companions of the children.

BLENGINS DWELL for the most part in rocky caves, some of which they dig themselves, and these underground spaces seem to have possessed intensely personal meanings for Darger. The Vivian girls, and their adult friends, frequently become hopelessly lost in caverns far beneath the earth, thus providing a pretext for elaborate and often very funny encounters with the Blengins (see illustration 6.6). In caves the creatures tend to surface when least expected from the depths of underground lakes. While their size and appearance can be terrifying, they are generally friendly as long as they are able to identify their human visitors as Christians. At such times they can be puppy-like and playful.

It is not known whether Darger had any actual experience of large underground cave systems, though he does mention the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky on one occasion. He certainly knew of the cavern in which Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher became lost, and several of his underground adventure stories seem to have been modeled on their romantically tinged encounter beneath the earth. Caverns unmistakably excited his imagination, inspiring astonishingly inventive portrayals of vast labyrinths extending deep into the bowels of the earth. In these wildly unnatural spaces, liquid rock flows in glowing rivers and cascades, lurid red light flickers and glows, and bottomless abysses yawn in the darkness. In these oddly fluid and irrational spaces Darger's other world seems actually to be coming into being, with powerful and dangerous geological forces still active and untamed. His drawings of this mysterious realm beneath the earth depict vast subterranean openings, glowing with luminous hues never before encountered in caves, in which children can wander as freely as in a dream (7.10). This warm and liquid underworld often seems to owe more to imaginative exploration of the body's inner spaces and cavities than to any conceivable frozen world of stone.

It is in these remote caverns that more peaceful Blengins are encountered: whole Blengiglomenean families at home with their children, coiled in the darkness, often asleep. In his description of the massive bodies of the sleeping serpents one senses the phallic nature of these creatures most clearly; their latent power and violence suggestive of Darger's own stirring, though dormant, sexuality. The caves seem to have been summoned into existence as a safe, warm, and remote space,



31 At Jennie Richee.
Hard pressed during storm
by pursuing enemy they
become lost in cavern of
volcanic Mt. Sootreemia.
Cavern at sections strangely
lighted by mysterious
source. Soldiers in
distance closing in on little girls.

7.10

Henry Darger

31 At Jennie Richee. Hard pressed during storm by pursuing enemy they become lost in cavern of volcanic Mt. Sootreemia. Cavern at sections strangely lighted by mysterious source. Soldiers in distance closing in on little girls. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

in which magical and faintly erotic encounters between gentle monsters and innocent little girls can occur under cover of darkness.

The opening of the cavern was huge, about a score of hundred feet, but not naturally made as they saw. They entered and saw that it had a floor that was extensive and went straight ahead. It was dark in the cave, but not dark enough to require a light, and so the little girls preceded for some way and was reaching the middle of the floor where appeared a lake of water, when right in front of them rising out of the water was a huge and beautiful creature who was aroused at their entrance.

It was a Blengiglomenean serpent and had a strange rounded head and spangled wings with stripes. It was surprised at their appearance, and giving forth a strange grunt, there appeared another one rising out of the water, for both of them had been swimming about and enjoying themselves in its cool depths. It looked at the little girls steadfastly and the little girls being taken with astonishment never moved.

Violet and her sisters were speechless with surprise and did not know what to say at their sudden appearance from the lake. The creatures however had seen the little girls before, though Violet and her sisters had never seen them in their lives. The Blengiglomenean serpents had observed all that the little girls had done during the whole war, and all of their horrifying experiences and of all they had done for the christian cause, and of the many children they had also saved by their tricks upon the wicked Glandelinians ...

The two Blengiglomenean Serpents were giant Dorthereans, and as beautiful as any Blengiglomenean creature that Violet and her sisters had ever seen ... They wondered if the creatures had any human voices, and so deciding to put the test, the little girls chose Violet to do the speaking. "Where are your young Blengins," asked Violet, "you are surely not all alone in this great cavern?" The female shook her head, and then started smiling. "I suppose if you saw how many of us were here in these caverns you would be surprised," she said. "We have a full household, and many are young too." "Why not come swimming with us," said the other great creature, "The water is warm and delightful." "We would like to," said Jennie, "but the fact is we have not thought of going in swimming this day, and so have not brought our suits along with us." "Never mind the bathing suits," said the creature, "just leave your undersuits on. It won't hurt them to get wet." Violet and her sisters decided to do so, and so within a few minutes were also in the water and having the best time of their lives.⁴³

In their almost limitless variety, and their constantly evolving form and function, the Blengiglomenean serpents reflect various distinct phases of Darger's own psychological development. Some of their more playful and humorous qualities may derive from the early years of his childhood, when he was still living at home.

There is another queer fact about these great Blengiglomenean creatures. Whenever they meet with anyone they do not like, they are known to make faces at them or stick their tongues out, like little children do when offering defiance. This is not the remarkable part about it. It is the danger of enemies making faces in return ... If the Glandelinian makes faces for sport or insult, the Blengin at once rushes upon him, and this onset no number of Glandelinians can withstand, and flight is in vain ... Since then no Glandelinians have made faces at the Blengiglomenean creatures anymore. All kinds, no matter what variety, do this thing, but what the main reason it is not known.⁴⁴

It seems possible that the reason for this delightful characteristic of Blengins is to be found in Darger's tendency, as a child, to make faces at adults, which may have gotten him into serious trouble. His fantasy involvement with Blengins seems to have continued without interruption from early childhood into his adult life, an observation which is probably not less true of other aspects of his creative process. A curious statement made by Jack Evans, Darger's alter ego, seems to link the later phases of Blengin evolution with Darger's adult life.

"When I was first working in St. Joseph's Hospital in this country, I saw a Blengiglomenean serpent that would open your eyes," said Evans as they were all seated around him in the lovely garden ... "Where it came from I do not know, but I saw it in the lovely country near the town of Belmont."⁴⁵

This curious "slip" raises questions about whether Darger did, in fact, see Blengins on his way to work in Chicago.

DESPITE THE HUMOR often present in Darger's descriptions of Blengiglomenean serpents, the chief need prompting the creation of Blengins was unquestionably Darger's adolescent experience of helplessness in the face of adult injustice. The monsters in *The Realms* were created to provide a much needed source of powerful magic protection, and violent possibilities of revenge. The essential characteristic of Blengins is their capacity for rage, which is aroused when they encounter cruelty or violence directed against children. The source of all such violence in *The Realms* is, of course, the evil Glandelinians, who are, therefore, the natural enemies of the entire Blengiglomenean species.

The Blengiglomenean creatures have never been known to show fury toward humanity before, and it was the world's greatest astonishment when the nations learned of the fury of these creatures toward the Glandelinians. But as related early in the first volumes, there was perfect reasons.⁴⁶

The wicked Glandelinians had destroyed many entrances [to the caves] of these beautiful creatures in Calverinia, and also maltreated their female creatures, by shelling them while in the sky. At first the creatures bore all this cruelty without even showing any resentment, even doing their best to keep themselves out of the way of the wicked Glandelinians. They had worked very hard to rebuild the wreckage of their entrances, and every time a batch of Glandelinians appeared, had retreated into the recesses of their caverns. This made the Glandelinians believe that big as the creatures were, they were nevertheless afraid of them. So to make it worse for these poor Blengiglomenean creatures, the rascally Glandelinians started to show the utmost cruelty to their young. This was, of course, the last straw, and after that all Glandelinians who dared show themselves in the vicinity of these creatures were pounced upon and torn in shreds by the claws of the Blengins. Many times, without warning, both male and female would rush upon a Glandelinian camp, and destroy all the soldiers, and the provisions. Many cases happened in which Blengiglomenean Serpents have betrayed a large camp of Glandelinians to the christian generals and caused the capture of the Glandelinian armies. It was much believed by the other nations that these creatures helped to win the war for the Abbieannians.⁴⁷

It was important to Darger that he justify the violent and destructive behavior of the Blengins, using an excuse familiar to all children — the Glandelinians started it! It was also essential that the creatures function as an immeasurably superior natural force, with only the young and not fully developed serpents vulnerable to attack by humans. Once enraged, the violence of Blengins is unrestrained and truly terrifying. It is a purely physical violence, a natural and automatic expression of their enormous bodies and their overwhelming strength. An uncalculated destructive force, their aggression is triggered instinctively and without thought, almost in innocence. There is no psychological admixture, in contrast to the violence of the Glandelinians, whose delight in monstrous cruelty is invariably motivated by powerful sadistic drives. Despite their terrifying destructive potential, the Blengins never appear to be evil.

Clearly, this potential for unrestrained violence was to be found coiled up and asleep within Darger himself. All of his life he struggled with his temper, experiencing it as difficult to restrain, constantly liable to break out and involve him in trouble. When we see the pure rage of the Blengiglomenean serpent, we are forced to realize the terrible force that Darger kept under restraint within himself. The creation of the Blengins was a matter of necessity, their explosive violence an essential outlet for Darger's suppressed anger and need for vengeance. Small wonder that he so obviously revels in their guileless capacity for murder in defense of helpless children.

Late during the evening when the storm was clearing away and the weather was cold, one of the army nurses who tended to Violet and her sisters went with them out on a scouting tour all wearing snow shoes, and no sooner had they left camp when a score of savage Glandelinians rushed upon the little party with drawn sabers with the intention of killing them brutally on the spot. As the little girls were about to draw their own weapons, they were surprised to see a considerable large winged creature of many beautiful colors come rushing straight for the Glandelinians, and that quite a number were also circling in sweeps high above in the sky. The eyes of the creature glared in a most frightful manner and with froth streaming from the tarlons of its wings and dripping to the snow, it showed its powerful fangs and let loose a horrible roar that stunned the little girls who thought the Blengiglomenean creature was also mad and was attacking them.

The deepness of the snow did not hinder its wild leaps, and with a howl it bounded right in front of the Vivian girls, coiled its tail around in a circle with them and the nurse in the middle, and then sprang at the Glandelinians flapping its huge wings wildly and preparing to strike a blow. One of the nearest Glandelinians pierced its wing through with his bayonet, and the creature in a blinding rage and maddened by pain sprang at the Glandelinian soldier and fastened his strong jaws upon his throat. The other Glandelinians sprang to the rescue with curses firing a

volley and managing to get the man from the foaming creature. Intent upon again reaching his victims, the strange Blengiglomenean creature sprang upon them with a frightful roar, his weight bearing ten of the Glandelinians into the snow. After knocking some of the Glandelinians down with its wing, and before they could recover themselves, the creature was once more upon the Glandelinians, tearing at their heads and body with its claws and making a pandemonium of a racket. Heedless of their own safety, the other Glandelinians desperately attacked the creature, and gathered some of the unconscious and bleeding comrades in their strong arms, only to be knocked down by a blow of the creature's wing. Protecting the wounded comrades against the animal which now attacked them, as best they could, while fighting off the creature, she or they crawled to a high snow bank and regain their feet ran for a ravine through the snow drifts while the other soldiers, the remainder of the group who had attacked Violet and her sisters and who had been a witness to this horrible scene, fled for safety. The enraged animal, its savage nature aroused to the point of madness by the fury of the Glandelinian resistance flew in pursuit.⁴⁸

It comes as a surprise to discover that in his drawings, as opposed to his writings, Darger was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to give full expression to the murderous rage of Blengins, and to the mayhem they inflict on their foes. Pictures involving the attack of dragon-form Blengins are

particularly rare, because the human variety of Blengiglomenean serpent had replaced the animal form well before the onset of Darger's serious involvement with large-scale collage-drawings. A rare and extremely beautiful pictorial rendering of such a battle is to be seen in an important painting in the Outsider Collection and Archive, London, entitled *Attack of Tuskorhorians on Glandelinians — Calverinia*⁴⁹ (7.11).

As in the written narrative we have just examined, one enormous Blengin (in this case identified as a Tuskorhorian), dominates the scene, leading the attack on the troops assembled below. Other dragon-form Blengins circle in the sky above. The picture is characterized by a curious and probably unconscious split between mundane reality (below) and the world of the unreal (above). The terrestrial level is inhabited by the cold and stiffly formal military discipline of the Glandelinian troops. An undifferentiated company of enemy soldiers have been assembled here by means of tracing, not one at a time, but in groups: at left, a mass of standing men; at right, a jumble of bodies thrown into disarray, the result of a Blengin attack from the air.⁵⁰ Darger has unified all of the uniformed figures with a wash of dark blue, touched here and there with black to distinguish boots and caps. Only occasionally does an individual face emerge from the bold groupings of impressionistically rendered forms. At center, a rearing horse rises dramatically into the air, throwing his rider in a moment of panic. Beneath him, a dark horse writhes in terror on the ground. These horses too are "borrowed from reality" by means of tracing.

7.11

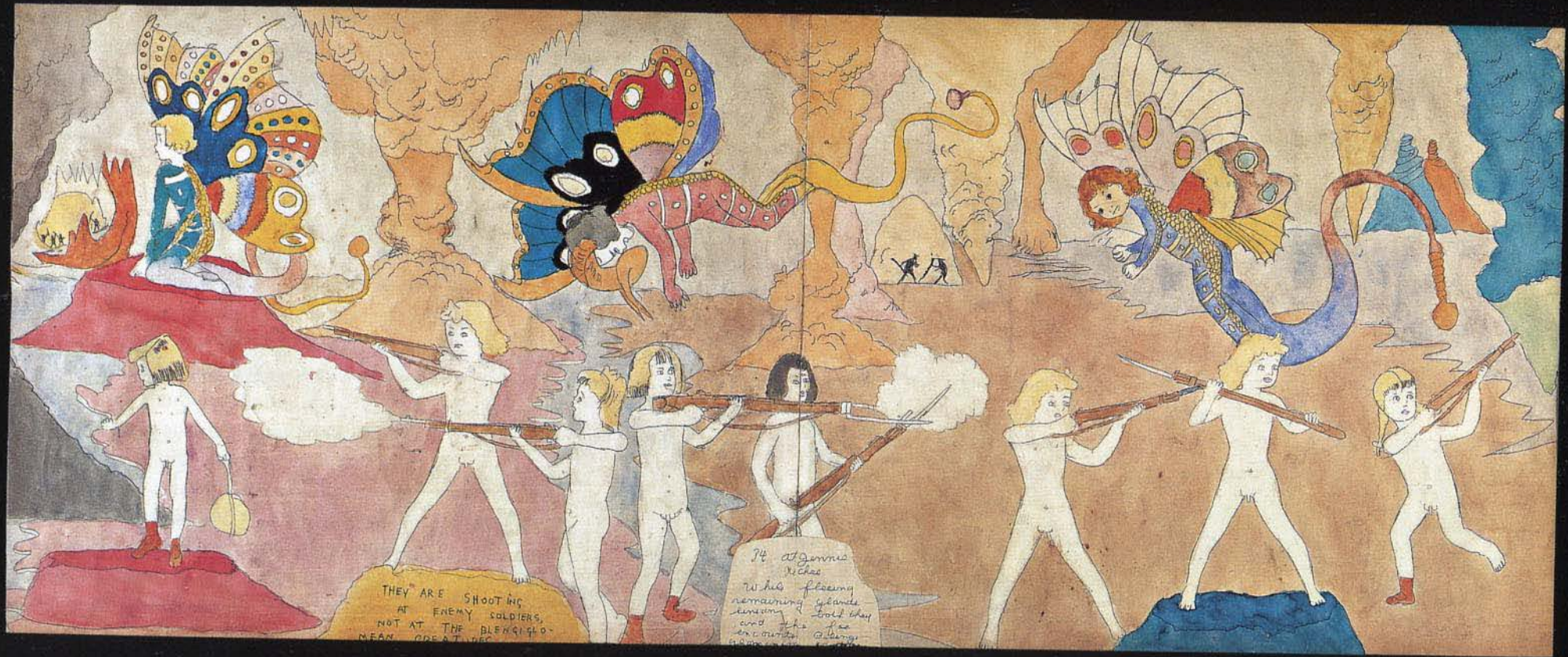
Henry Darger

Attack of the Tuskorhorians on Glandelinians - Calvernia, all types pictured here are frightfully venomous [see chapter two volume four]. Water-color and pencil on paper. 48.5 x 60.5 cm. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. On loan from the Musgrave Kinley Collection of Outsider Art. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



This coldly rational scene is suddenly invaded by the frenetic, jazz-band unreality of the Blengiglomenean species, with its gyrating bodies, electric colors, flaming contours, and polka-dot or rainbow-striped wings. Abandoning tracing along with reality, Darger now allows himself to draw the Blengins of his imagination with absolute conviction and abandon. This is his own form: freer, more richly detailed, and exploding with radiant reds, yellows, pinks, and purples. The preposterously elongated body of a winged serpent swoops low across the battle-field, its tapered tail looping through space with the flashy brilliance and speed of a roller coaster. Claws bared, fangs exposed, and breathing fire, the dazzling reptile attacks the Glandelinians with all the vehemence and menace of "Puff the Magic Dragon."⁵¹ The sky, now filled with a riotous tangle of multicolored Blengins in various sizes, responds to the hallucinatory spectacle by blushing pink. At the level of the horizon, an enormous human-headed blengin pokes his rosy face above the flaming spine of the Tuskorhorian creature, an odd cartoon figure let loose on this possessed and dreamlike field of battle. Along with the helplessly disoriented Glandelinians, we are plunged with extreme suddenness into Darger's astonishingly unreal and wildly imaginative other world. The Blengins are the liberating force: violent, beautiful, charmingly deadly, and utterly improbable.

IT IS ONE OF THE PARADOXES of Darger's vision that violence is always juxtaposed with beauty, evil with innocence. Blood merges with pastel tones. Even in his writings, in scenes of pure terror, he will pause for a moment of aesthetic reflection. This is a fundamental aspect of his creative impulse. Outbursts of overwhelmingly intense feeling are always embodied in innocent and tranquil forms



7.12

Henry Darger

34 At Jennie Richee.

While fleeing
remaining
Glandelinians both
they and the foe
encounter

Blengiglomenean
creatures. They are
Shooting at Enemy
Soldiers, not at the
Blengiglomenean

creatures. Collage-
drawing. Watercolor,
and carbon on paper.
18 x 47 in. Collection
of Sam and Betsey
Farber, New York.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

and colors, or in hauntingly evocative language. With hell unleashed and violence all around, he steps back momentarily to contemplate the loveliness of the attacking Blengins, or the innocent beauty of a frightened little girl. This is well exemplified in the following excerpt, the description of a marvelous battle which takes place in the depths of a great cave (7.12):

They had emerged into another cavern under the floor of the first, which had many small grottoes with no outlet, large avenues, domes, impassible lakes of unknown extent, and fearful abysses like the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. Also it had diamond chambers and was indescribably rich in crystal beauty ... also the lakes seemed to have strange creatures swimming in them looking like dragonic monsters ... It was more huge than any dragon ever read of, but no more ugly than a harmless butterfly. It was too beautiful in color to be imagined, though, of course, its body, now revealed, was covered with numberless tarlons venomous as the posion of a thousand cobras, also its two fangs was equally as posionous. The creature, however, was not a dangerous wild beast, but one of the good, child-loving, Blengiglomenean creatures so much heard of in Angelinia, and it had been attracted by the arrival of the Glandelinians who were charging for the christians. The Glandelinians themselves were in great peril, for the creature, giving forth a sudden deafening roar, fixed its dazzling eyes on them and prepared to make an

attack. The smell of that strange sweetness came directly from the creature, who flourished gigantic wings of all dazzling bright hues, and, all at once, from the creature's body there extended a peculiar beautiful green light which grew brighter and brighter, and now the monster advanced toward the christians, flapping its huge butterfly-like wings furiously, making an uncanny din and moving in a way to confront the approaching Glandelinians.

The color of the creature, no artist could picture. Its wings were of thousands of indescribably bright colors with ivory black and chrome yellow tarlons. Its belly was sap green, its scales of pure gold, while the tarlons on its body were of madder rose color, and also its tongue and lips were of pure crimson. The teeth were milky white, and its ears and long protruding tuskorhorian horns of indigo. Its eyes glowing were of vermilion green, and so was the beautiful light coming from its entire body. It was indeed one of the well known Blengiglomenean creatures, and they had no more fear whatever.⁵² The nearest Glandelinians, seeing what they had come upon, and that it arrived to the defense of the christians, prepared to use their bayonets against the advancing creature which roared so terribly that the very cavern shook as if there was an earthquake ...

The creature reclined against the floor, coiling its horrible iron spiked tail to deliver a blow at the Glandelinians, should they come too near the christian fugitives.

The Glandelinians were not undaunted by this threatening attitude, as the creature's look of fury seemed all gone and a docile look overspreads its beautiful face, but before the Glandelinians knew what the creature intended to do, it gave a peculiar grin, and suddenly swung its coiled tail through the air with a crashing roar of smashed rocks, darting it at the Glandelinians like a flash of lightening. Fortunately for the Glandelinians it missed them, but it was apparent that the creature meant this only as a warning, for the aim was purposely untrue, but nevertheless the tip of the tail landed against a huge boulder, sending it spinning through the ranks of the fleeing Glandelinians, toppling many of them on their faces, and spinning for eighteen hundred feet afterwards and rolling into the river with a great splash. All in the cavern were sent sprawling by the shock ... and then, with another indescribable roar, and flapping of its huge wings, the creature next rose into the air and darted headlong at the Glandelinians, just as several squads of them regained their feet and fired. The volley of shots struck the creature in the abdomen, but only slightly wounded it, which this time enraged it. It had not evidently expected any resistance from the Glandelinians, and was indeed astonished at their recklessness ...

All the exits of the cavern the creatures blocked, and set up such a chorus of roaring that it sounded like the explosions of an erupting volcano. Then, after a final roar, the creatures charged slowly toward the Glandelinians, swinging their tails ready to deliver a blow at the muskets that the gray coated men held in their hands, to prevent their discharging them. But, simultaneously, all the soldiers fired their muskets filling the cavern with smoke and slightly wounding two of the creatures ... Flapping their huge wings, they darted at the soldiers like a tornado, hovering above them for a moment, then bore down a hundred of them to the ground in one rush, badly mangled and crushed. It was a terrible scene ... One after another of the Blengins rushed furiously at the remaining Glandelinian soldiers, and now there was a lively time as the creatures gave no pause, and now two hundred Glandelinians were lying dead ... The green light was already at its brightest, and vapors of all colors pervaded the cavern like a thick mist hiding the very walls out of sight.⁵³

The Blengins and the End of the War

Although Darger emphasized the naturalness of the Blengiglomenean species, insisting on their absolute physical reality as wild, winged animals, throughout *The Realms*, he hints, again and again, that there is a supernatural side to their being. This "spiritual" aspect of Blengins is reflected in their otherwise unexplained respect for the Christian faith, and their profound love of human children. It is clear that the creatures are linked in some unspoken way to their Creator. "What was God's purpose in putting these creatures upon land?"⁵⁴ One might also question the Divine intention in creating creatures of such staggering size and power, in such vast numbers. "[N]o one could ever count them outside of God himself."⁵⁵

Although Darger took great pleasure in describing the placid nature and loving ways of these creatures of his imagination, he had, on occasion, to emphasize the other side of their character. He was puzzled by their God-engendered violence, pondering the question, to what spiritual realm do Blengins belong?

There is, however, one great mystery about these great Blengiglomenean creatures that is very questionable. God alone knows how many fiends and evil creatures are existing in the eternal hells of perdition ... creatures of the valley of the shadow of death.⁵⁶

He clearly seeks to establish their status as mythological beings with a dark side, demonic servants of a just but vengeful God. It is the astonishingly violent role played by the Blengins at the

end of the war, as the bearers of divine justice, that finally establishes their true stature, revealing their ultimate function in *The Realms*, and in God's far from perfect world.

ONE OF THE MAGNIFICENT puzzles associated with *The Realms*, as a vast mythological epic, is the fact that the work concludes with two, essentially irreconcilable, endings. The more rational of these, that found at the end of the final volume, has already been discussed (see pp. 229-231).⁵⁷ Only a few pages into the first volume of *The Realms*, however, a far different conclusion is described.⁵⁸ This ending is imposed by the Blengins, acting alone, but seemingly as the representatives of a just and vengeful God. It is the fearful destruction of the Glandelinian nation and all its people, that finally provides an explanation of the existence and meaning of the Blengiglomenean species. Emerging briefly from their unconscious state of animal innocence, they now serve as the *deus ex machina* through which God enters *The Realms* to punish his ruthless and blasphemous foes. Not content with the complete military defeat of their armies, He employs the Blengiglomenean serpents to carry out the final solution, the total obliteration of the Glandelinian people from the Realms of the Unreal.

The scene is set outside of an internment camp for Glandelinian prisoners of war. We learn of these final events along with the Vivian girls, who are trying to discover why the prisoners are still being attacked by Blengins despite the fact that the war is over. It is their Blengin friend Rover who tells the story.

"Do you children know how many children have been slain in Calverinia?" asked the Roverine. "There is no hope for the Glandelinians" said the Roverine fiercely. "It is better that the guards withdraw, as the others above in the sky are holding a council among themselves, and I know that they mean to swoop upon the camp and even destroy the guards if they interfere. I am in particular the leader of those in the sky, and have my reasons for punishing the Glandelinians. I'm doing it to avenge your own sufferings, in particular, as well as the harm done to my young ones, and the harm done to the young ones of the rest, besides the slaughters of the war."⁵⁹

This is a Rover we haven't met before: determined, powerful, and set on revenge! Sounding strangely superior to the little girls, whose opinions are no longer taken into account, he assumes his true role as "leader of those in the sky," sternly announcing the fate of the enemy below. But now he unveils a mystery, the punishment not of a prison camp, but of a nation.

"Us creatures, unknown to you as yet, have fearfully devastated the Glandelinian country, having wiped out all the Glandelinian armies ourselves, and also destroying the women who proved themselves enemies of God ... The Glandelinians will not be forgiven. We forgive insults and anything else, but what they have done is beyond the forgiveness of the God you worship, and so why should we abstain from destroying the damnable snakes in human form?" And with this, the creature

opened his wings and disappeared almost suddenly into the sky.⁶⁰

The children (and the reader) are presented with a *fait accompli*.

There is no saving the Glandelinians at all. The creatures have also slain all the soldiers of the enemy in Glandelinia. Practically wiped out the nation as it were.⁶¹

This stunning turn of events, imposed from above, seems to render heroic human involvement in the making of war and peace meaningless and redundant, all concerns with questions of guilt or innocence superfluous. The long years of military struggle now appear to have been a pointless exercise; the terrible suffering and the heroism of the Vivian girls unnecessary. If, as now appears, the Blengins could have carried out this ultimate act of destruction at any time, why did they wait until the conclusion of hostilities? Were they waiting for orders? If God is responsible, why did He withhold his crushing response to human evil until the war had been won? We are told that the Glandelinians had somehow moved out beyond any possibility of God's forgiveness. But Darger is careful not to make clear whose opinion this was, God's or that of the Blengins themselves. It isn't really evident whether the final solution is imposed by God, or by the Blengins as wild animals acting on their primitive impulses. Had the Blengins slipped unknowingly into evil, becoming themselves "damnable snakes in human form"? Or had God unleashed the Blengins? Certainly Darger absolves himself and the Christian nations of any guilt for this greatest of all massacres in *The Realms*. Vengeance has somehow been achieved, without responsibility.⁶²

The two endings seem to correspond to different needs and different levels of experience within Darger himself. We know that during his own life he constantly struggled to be forgiving, rational, and understanding, a Christian to the best of his ability. Like his heroines the Vivian girls, he sought to forgive his enemies again and again. But deep inside, a primitive and powerful longing for vengeance stirred like a sleeping Blengin in the darkness of his soul, a terrible hunger for revenge. The Blengins have their origin in this dynamic and constantly shifting balance between two contradictory urges; but in the end, and almost as an afterthought, they couldn't be restrained. His anger at the harm done to himself, and "the rest of the young ones," had become too great.

The Blengiglomenean Lance

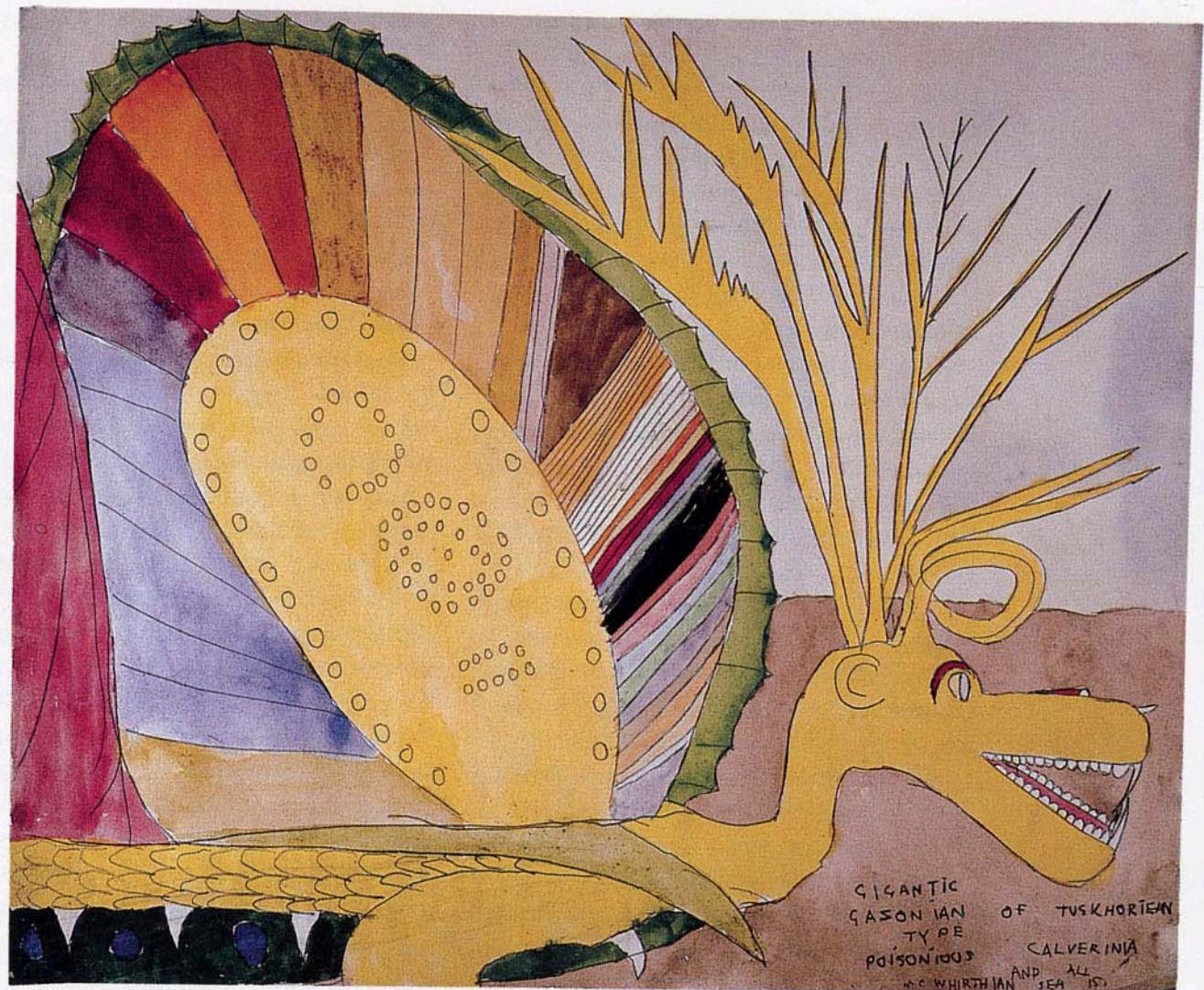
All Blengiglomenean creatures, either of human or animal form, fall into one of two additional categories, venomous or non-venomous. In depicting any one of these creatures of his imagination, Darger almost invariably indicates to which class it belongs. The idea of a "poisonous," and therefore very dangerous, serpent was obviously important to him. The deadly venom is found in various parts of the creature's body: in the "tarlons" on the tips of its segmented wings, along its back, and on its hands and feet. The serpent's bite is particularly deadly, because of the poison fangs in its mouth.

Darger was profoundly interested in the internal anatomy of the mouth of Blengins. Those of animal form possessed impressive ranges of highly specialized teeth. The Gazonian, for example, has "fourteen long fangs, and sixty three teeth, besides two long feelers on their tongue."⁶³ In his drawings of dragon-like Blengins, he depicted the teeth with great care, and he delighted in describing in words the damage those teeth could inflict (7.13).

Pouncing on the nearest Glandelinians with the fury of a panther, it bit their hands, and tore open the throat of one of the Glandelinians, partly crushing his head in its powerful jaws, and lacerating his face so no one could recognize him.⁶⁴

As we have seen, some of the teeth carry poisonous venom:

... the grinning mouth, partly open, showed rows of teeth exactly in the form of the teeth of a man, only that on the upper jaw on each side, two teeth seemed longer and pointed, and red foamy substance issued from these two peculiar teeth.⁶⁵



7.13

Henry Darger

Gigantic Gazonian of
Tuskhorian Type.

Poisonous. Calvernia.

13 7/8 x 16 7/8 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Darger's tremendous rage is embodied in these deadly teeth, and in the poisonous venom which issues from them. "No one who has medical skill can save a victim even accidentally bitten by one of them or injured by a tarlon of its wings."⁶⁶ Oral aggression lurks in the heart of *The Realms*, often exploding in orgies of verbal violence. But detailed study of the mouths of Blengins also carries us unexpectedly into surprising and pleasurable territory.

Inside the oral cavity of Blengiglomenean serpents is a tubelike structure which has a direct bearing on the mysterious, indeed supernatural, nature of the Vivian girls. Darger's account of acts of astonishing intimacy involving Blengins and little girls, events occurring in the secret depths of caverns far beneath the earth, comes as a considerable surprise. Even he appears to have been reluctant to speak of such things, and, when nonetheless driven to do so, forced himself to return repeatedly to the secret he was obviously trying to avoid. "There is, however, a very mysterious thing concerning the Blengiglomenean creatures, which it is hard to explain in correct words, but nevertheless can be described in as many words as possible."⁶⁷

It is apparent that Darger is on the edge of remembering something, something originating in the deepest regions of his own experience, something of which it is forbidden to speak.

It is well and good if anyone could take notice of an open mouth of a great Blengiglomenean creature of any kind, human or not. They have three membranes in their mouth. A huge tongue, a long forked tongue also, and a long sharp hollow thing in their mouth, attached as

it seems to its tonsils, which has the form of a thin blue or yellow lance or needle. The forked tongue is the deadly fang weapon, besides the fanged teeth, but the most peculiar thing of all is the membrane that looks so much like a long lance. Every different kind of Blengiglomenean creature has one of a different color. Some may be green, blue, orange, red, orange proper, or pink, and scarlet. Others are of every different color the artist may know, excepting one color is left out, and that is that none are found to be black.⁶⁸

Under certain conditions, this lance is the source of a fluid "of very sweet smell." When injected into the body of an innocent child, this fluid is the bearer of truly magical properties.

But to go on with the main subject, there is a power in that lance which takes effect upon anyone stuck by it, whether children or not. But this is on certain conditions only. It has no effect upon grown persons unless they are in the same innocence as children are ... How it is done by the creature is not readily known, as the Blengiglomenean creatures are cautious and shy, and will reveal to no one its secrets, except that they are compelled to do so under extreme necessities.⁶⁹

Clearly, Henry, in these passages, was speaking "under extreme necessities."

For much of the endless course of *The Realms*, the secret of the Vivian girls is carefully, very consciously, and, one might say, tantalizingly concealed. Again and again we are reminded of their supernatural nature: their moral perfection and its manifestation in their astonishing beauty, their seeming indestructibility and immortality, and their all but magical powers in the face of monstrous terror, destructiveness, and death. Yet, in a short passage, probably inserted into volume one long after much of the story had been written, Darger offers a strange, all but irrational, and disturbingly sexual, explanation of their unique powers, which might pass unnoticed by the unsuspecting reader. He describes events which occurred in the cave at Phelantonburg; intimate, all but forgotten, physical experiences which forged an indivisible bond between the Blengins and these little girls.⁷⁰

Hanson said, "I believe my little nieces have been treated the same way at Phelantonburg when they took refuge in a cavern belonging to a set of great Blengiglomenean serpents. At least there are traces of it on their little breasts. Is it not so, Violet?" he asked.

"Yes," said Violet, remembering that day, "and I have never known what it was to be even afraid of any wicked Glandelinian since then, and never have felt sad anymore."

"What was the membrane that the creature did it with?" asked Evans of Violet, "Did you or any of your sisters ever see it?"

"No, we didn't," said Violet. "After the attack, it put us all into a deep trance or sleep, and when we revived, we felt as if all the sorrows of the world was gone from

us. But we never saw anything but that the creatures embraced us just before the happiness came. They did not reveal the lances to us."

"Maybe you little girls could find out from your guardian, the Blengin in the garden," said Hanson, "He may show you hi hers."⁷¹

Darger is singularly vague, and was probably genuinely uncertain, about what was occurring in this mysterious exchange, with its final significant slip. He visualizes the process as being like an "injection," with a fluid passing from the Blengin's mouth, through a needle-like tube which is inserted into the body of a child. Speaking of these lances, he says,

They are sharp but also hollow, and at times a fluid of a very sweet smell comes from them. Those are the lances which if pierced into the blood veins of a little girl or boy causes him or her [to feel] the strange happiness as soon as the fluid is injected. How great the happiness is depends on how long the injection lasts.⁷²

Before examining the effects of this curious injection on its fictional young recipients, it seems necessary to consider its origin in Henry's mind. Here, as elsewhere in *The Realms*, we seem to be encountering the incomprehensible mixture of knowledge and innocence, of terrible sexual confusion and actual personal experience. It is almost impossible to distinguish fantasy from reality, fact from theory. On one level, the account of the Blengiglomenean lance and its effects seems to reflect the confused ideas and misconceptions, the sexual theories and fragmentary experiences,

shared by adolescent boys in an institution. Some of Henry's descriptions may repeat quite precisely things he might have heard. Other aspects of his story obviously originate in his own, highly subjective speculations, embodying his obsessional preoccupation with sadistic cutting into the interior of the body.

The fact that the lance is found in the mouth of the Blengin, rather than elsewhere, the preoccupation with the "three membranes," and the very precise description of a sweet-smelling fluid, all seem far too specific and detailed not to derive from actual experience. It seems probable that Darger, along with other children in the asylum, was the passive recipient of just such an injection, in the form of a penis and a sweet-smelling fluid introduced into his mouth. Given the almost incredible condition of neglect and abuse typical of the Lincoln Asylum during Henry's stay there, it is almost certain that he would have been sexually exploited.⁷³ The traumatic nature of Darger's early sexual experience is suggested by his insistence that the children fall "into a deep trance or sleep" during the crucial encounter with the Blengins, later awakening with no memory of what had occurred. The blocking out of all memory of such events occurring in childhood may serve to account for some of the otherwise unexplained gaps in Henry's sexual knowledge, as well as providing insight into the uncontrolled eruptions of sadistic violence and rage in his story.

However, in the context of our present investigation of Blengins and their role in *The Realms*, it is important to observe how overwhelmingly frightening, and passively experienced, events have been transformed, transferred unconsciously into the safe and playful world of these good and beautiful monsters with whom Darger so obviously identified. Strikingly, it is from sexual assaults that the Blengins rescue the children, these great phallic beasts themselves becoming the source of protection and vengeance (see illustration 8.8).

I remember a soldier telling of Glandelinians from a nearby camp, when the weather was ten below zero, take children seized from their homes, and forcing off all of their clothes, leave them tied to trees until nearly frozen to death, and then about to tear upon their bodies, when down upon them swooped a gigantic creature, who first restored the children to consciousness, and warming them with the folds of its wings, and then rushing upon the Glandelinians and in one moment lay them prone in death, and then carry off the children to the nearest christian camp. Then, as he said, it returned and wrecked its vengeance on the Glandelinian camp, killing every Glandelinian there.⁷⁴

The traumatic experiences and emotions which I believe lie concealed within and behind these fantastic creatures could have provided the powerful motive force which enabled Darger to write about them with such absolute conviction. Embodied in these creatures of fantasy were forgotten and sublimated fragments of truth, which lend the Blengiglomenean serpents their undeniable reality. As Darger pointed out:

It could be possible that if those kind of creatures would be true in existence, and lived in this world, the children living here would never know what sorrow meant, if they happened to run into one of these creatures.⁷⁵

In short, even if God hadn't invented Blengiglomenian serpents, Darger would have had to.

Having attributed all possible evil, and in particular, monstrous and perverse activities directed at children to the Glandelinians, he was free to explore the wonderful, indeed miraculous, effects of the Blengiglomenian serpent's injection.

The effect of the lance of the young creatures is not quite so strong as of the grown ones, and Violet and her sisters received theirs from young Blengiglomenian creatures only, and it was possible that it could be done again. The effects don't remain long if done by young creatures ... But if lanced by the large and powerful ones the effects never leave, and only increase month by month, until it seems possible that instead of mere children the happy victims are more like joyous persons of heaven, and their happiness is indescribable to see, and also the children thus treated in this form finally turns to extreme and most dazzling beauty, and also is immune from harm that may be intended by any damned evil creature of hell or any living ones of the earth and universe.⁷⁶

In that the Vivian princesses so obviously display all of the characteristics associated with penetration by the lance in the most extreme form, it comes as a surprise to hear that they

received their inoculation only from a small Blengin. Darger's intention here seems to be to imply that they would need to be injected again; he was apparently not anxious to bring the exciting process of injection to an end where it concerned his dream children. Perhaps their experience at Phelantonburg was but the first of many.⁷⁷ Elsewhere he identifies the type of Blengin involved as a "whipple Blengiglomenian serpent."⁷⁸

The initial effect of the act of penetration is described as involving feelings of intense, almost unbearable happiness. But, miraculous results soon follow, changes modeled on inoculation. "They [Blengins] have even in their very blood a peculiar fluid that destroys the ravages of the most incurable diseases known."⁷⁹ Over time the child victim is transformed into a sublimely beautiful, heavenly being, immune from all forms of danger and strikingly free of sadness and fear. Later it becomes apparent that they are all but immortal and cannot be killed. "It is also stated that good children, or good people of any kind, who are thus effected by the Blengiglomenian creatures, live just as long as the Blengiglomenian creatures themselves."⁸⁰ Darger also seems to imply that there is an element of the supernatural about the experience, with the children being transformed into ideal examples of Christian piety. A permanent bond has been established between the children and their serpent friends, who now serve as guardian angels circling in the sky and protecting the children below.

The magic power of the Blengin's lance, though probably conceived as a means of accounting for the supernatural beauty and power of his child heroines, the Vivian girls, is extended to large numbers of children in the story, in order to explain their survival in war. It becomes apparent that the creatures have been extremely active in inoculating children, seemingly long before the Vivian princesses were born. "The children who have been thus treated number by the millions. All rescued child slaves have received this lancing, and are now more happy than natural children."⁸¹

The token of the permanent bond between the Blengins and their "happy victims" is a small spot or scar marking the point of entry of the lance.

The seal is a small round spot on the body where she or he had been lanced. It may be in the breast, arm, neck, or even hand, and the fact is that it has the form of a print like a Japanese sun designed on the flag. The size of the spot is sometimes as large as a quarter, or half a dollar, and has a beautiful pinkish hue. Every touch the child receives on that spot starts the extreme part of the happiness all over again.⁸²

Although the Vivian girls and other children are commonly represented in Darger's drawings without clothes on, this small pink spot is never, to my knowledge, depicted. General Hanson, however, describes the seal on the bodies of his nieces and other children:

"One of the little girls came up to me like a happy singing bird. I noticed the same red spot on her chest, just what is on the chest of the little darlings of the nation. I used to wonder what that particular red

7.14

Henry Darger
*Human Headed
Blengins of Calverine
Island, Catherine Isles.
Males. Venomous.
Only the creatures of
heaven can combat
these creatures.*
Watercolor, pencil,
and carbon tracing
on pieced paper. 19 x
24 in. Collection of
the American Folk Art
Museum, New York.
Museum purchase
and gift. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



spot meant and now I have found out. A child made happy by the goodness and kindness of these creatures, are marked by a seal on their breast, and should any man lay a hostile hand on that child in front of a Blengiglomenean serpent, he would meet a furious creature more terrible than a hell demon in a rage. I examined the red spot on the child's breast, and accidentally touched it, with the same result that has, and still happens to my little nieces, a sudden strange happiness striking her almost prostrate. I could never understand how the Blengiglomenean serpent ever made children so happy in this fashion, and yet prevent all harm from falling upon them."⁸³

This passage provides one of the few indications we have in the writings that Darger had experience both of masturbation and of orgasm.⁸⁴ The red dot on the breast is as close as he was ever to come to acknowledging the existence of the female genital. The sensitivity of the red dot, and the fact that it continued to be a source of intense physical pleasure long after the initial penetration, can be understood as referring to the functioning of any of a number of erogenous zones. At the same time, it suggests the compulsive hold which traumatic events have on the imagination, revealing the extent to which Darger's adult sexuality was circumscribed and distorted by his adolescent experience of sexual assault.⁸⁵

Humanizing the Blengins

Darger's most original contribution to the evolution of the Blengiglomenean species was, unquestionably, the invention of Blengins whose bodies are those of children, generally little girls. In its ultimate form this involved the simple addition of a tail, wings, and animal horns of various kinds to the body and head of a naked child. As always in Darger's drawings the children's bodies were traced from borrowed illustrations. These humanized Blengins dominate the collage-drawings almost completely, the pure dragon form of Blengin having all but disappeared from the large compositions which Darger created as the pictorial equivalent of *The Realms*.⁸⁶ If the task of illustrating *The Realms* was undertaken, as I believe, after much of the text had been written, then these child Blengins represent the final phase in the evolution of the creatures, and an invention of extraordinary psychological importance.⁸⁷

Darger's speculations about the origins of Blengins, in particular the theory that they may be "the descendants of great dragons," support the hypothesis that those of purely animal form may have originated first, long before serpents with partially human bodies appeared in his fantasies. There are also a number of intermediate types, for example, Blengins with human heads joined at the neck to long snake bodies (7.14). These "Rebbonna Blengins" have children's faces which have been traced, while the serpents' bodies are Darger's own invention. One can imagine his delight in discovering this new form of Blengin which brought him closer to the children he loved. In the case of the Whip-lash Tail Rebbonna, the face, perhaps

that of a boy, is naturalistically colored, with blond hair, blue eyes, and red lips. Darger's exuberant love of color finds playful expression in the wings, the flowered decoration of which has no parallel in nature. The face and body of the Sting Tail Rebbonna are painted a deep pink, demonstrating the fact that the skin of human-form Blengins may be any color whatever.

The move into the playful fantasy world of partially human Blengins, an event which may have occurred long before *The Realms* came into being, carried Darger deeper into his inner world, with wishful images responding more closely to his personal needs and fantasies. The elaboration of pictorial images embodying these fantastic hybrids, which probably happened later in the process, must have been both exciting and fun. Darger's sense of humor would have been tickled by these strange juxtapositions of forms, and his creative powers were challenged by the need to discover surprising and convincing transitions between human and animal forms. His good-humored playfulness is evident in the part-human images which seem unusually spontaneous and inventive. At this point it became apparent that anything was possible; his imagination was liberated, and he was free to go still further in humanizing these creatures of his imagination. Inevitably, the addition of more and more human anatomical detail awakens memories in us, and perhaps in Darger too, of stories of children transformed into strange monsters, their innocent spirits trapped inside of bestial and hideous bodies. The invention of Blengins with complete human bodies was an enormously significant final move, involving dramatic changes of meaning. We begin to speculate on who these

child Blengins are, and how they may have come to be transformed in this way. We become far more concerned with their unique reality and their fate.

In Darger's conception of the constantly evolving anatomy of Blengins, it is clear that form follows function. As the need arose for Blengins to do specific things, their bodies seem to have responded by developing new features. For example, the decision to create human-headed animals may in part have been motivated by his wish to have at least some of his Blengins able to speak in human language. Other anthropomorphic Blengins were called into being possessed of a human head, trunk, and arms. Darger points out why certain Blengins might need arms:

They can read, and understand the most difficult figuring, but if not human headed and without arms and hands like the Rebbonas, they then are not able to write. It is not that they would not have the knowledge, it is because they could not write with their feet. Without hands how could they do it?⁸⁸

Clearly, the addition of a human torso and arms, in all sorts of amazing colors and textures, also increased the expressive potential of these creatures, adding an element of childish charm, seductiveness, and allure. Human arms and hands also increase the Blengins' capacity for violence:

... to the world itself, the greatest mystery about the creatures is that so many of them, and the most gigantic of all, have human heads and part way human bodies, with arms so muscular as to rend in pieces an iron bar twenty feet thick.⁸⁹

Again and again Darger stresses that the human form of Blengin is the largest and the most dangerous; "indeed when struck and wounded by a bullet, the human-headed Blengin abandons itself to rage and fury beyond description."⁹⁰ He revels in the fact that these innocent-looking beings possess enormous and deadly tails, and that despite their doll-like appearance they are unimaginably dangerous and can kill at will. These surprising developments in the world of Blengins were partly necessitated by Darger's need to bring the huge animals closer and closer to the Vivian girls and their friends, modifying their size and shape so as to allow for greater physical proximity, even intimacy. In time, the Blengins and the children would all but merge.

The terminology invented by General Hanson to describe the various members of the species becomes particularly confused where Blengins of human form are concerned.

"These kind discovered with gigantic Roverines with human heads and arms, which later were called the human headed Roverines, and Rebbonna ... Some of the biggest Roverines are called Crimecerians, Crimemercians, and Crimeerceans. But the common Dorthereans, called human headed Roverines, are [also] called Rebbonna, which means great creatures with a serpent's body and human form in one."⁹¹

The term "Dortherean" is almost certainly derived from Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Elsewhere Darger tells us that Hanson used the term "Zoeannians, which means great serpents with human heads and partly bodies," but this term is then dropped and never appears again.⁹²

On the Beauty of Blengins

Although Blengins live for thousands of years, they do not age. As a result, the human form of Blengin always possesses the body or face of a child, and no Blengin is ever depicted with the body of a mature human being.

The most mystery of all about these great creatures was that three quarters of their full number had human heads, but never have been observed even when full grown to have the head of a grown person. A creature found at the age of a thousand months or even years, have been observed to have the same childish head, but of a greater size than when young.⁹³

Darger's insistence on the extraordinary beauty of all Blengins may eventually have led to the paradoxical bringing together of that most beautiful of forms, the body of a child, and the elongated tail of a dragon (7.15). In the intermediate types he was undoubtedly influenced by the more familiar bodies of mermaids, whose sensuous form he was able to enhance with spectacularly colored wings. The appearance of Blengins with the exciting bodies of little girls inspired him to new heights of aesthetic response.

In truth to nature it may be safely asserted that beauty is not merely confined to humanity in this story. It was more frequently found among the human headed Blengins and Tuskorhorians ... in this instant I wish to be understood as speaking of physical beauty and this only.⁹⁴

One of the strangest passages in *The Realms* describes Hanson's encounter with a Dortherean of unusual beauty.



7.15

Henry Darger

*Child-Headed
Whiplash-Tail Blengins,
Blengiglomenean
Island. Watercolor,
pencil, and carbon
tracing on paper.
18 1/4 x 23 1/4 in.
Collection of the
American Folk Art
Museum, New York.
Promised gift of Sam
and Betsey Farber.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.*

"I met such a specimen as had often driven men mad, and whose possession has many a time paved the way to subversion of empire on the part of the Abbieannian monarchs. The Dortherean was rather above the medium size of the other kind of human headed Blengins. Her finely chiseled chin, nose, and forehead, were singularly Grecian. Her beautifully molded neck and shoulders and arms looked as though they might have been borrowed from Juno. The development of her entire form was as perfect as nature could make it. She was arrayed in the most beautiful wings ever seen on any Blengiglomenean creature, striped in the beautiful parts, and strewn with myriads of flowers in the form of pansies, roses, carnations and other kinds the artists have ever known. The hair and eye brows of her beautiful girlish head were as glassy as shining gold. I was even surprised to see that around her head was carefully twined a wreath of the beautiful native flowers of those singular islands. Her lips seemed fragrant with the odor of her saliva. But her eyes. I never shall forget those lovely eyes. They retained something that spoke of affection so deep, a spiritual existence so intense, a dreamy enchantment so inexpressively beautiful, that they reminded one of the beautiful Greek girl, Myrrha, in Byron's tragedy of Sardanapalus, whose love clung to the old Monarch when the flames of the funeral pile formed their winding sheet. In no former period of my life had I ever raised my hat to beauty, but at this moment, in such a presence,



7.16

Henry Darger

Spangled Blengins,
Boy King Islands.
One is a young
Tuskerhorian, the
other a human headed
Dortherean. Water-
color and collage.
16 7/8 x 13 7/8 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

I took it off. I was entirely fascinated, charmed, spell bound now. I stopped my horse and there I sat, to take a further glance at the fair reality. Half human being, half dragon. As the creature stopped, and I returned the glance while a sweet smile parted her lips, and partly revealed a set of teeth and two sharp pointed fangs as white as snow and of matchless perfection. I felt that smile to be an unsafe atmosphere for the nerves of an old bachelor like I was, so I bowed, replaced my hat, and passed on my way feeling fully assured that nothing but the chisel of Praxiteles could have copied her exquisite charms. And as I moved past her she exclaimed in the vocabulary of her one voice, 'Love and protection to you.'"⁷⁵

It is absolutely certain that Darger has borrowed most of this curiously awkward and contrived incident from an unidentified literary source, modifying it sufficiently to bring it into conformity with his text.⁷⁶ The process is not unlike the additive technique whereby his collage-drawings came into being. Any image which moved him in a piece of writing or in a pictorial illustration could be incorporated into his other world.

A significant example of pictorial borrowing occurs in the drawing *Spangled Blengins, Boyking Islands*, which is included in the set of "Pictures of Blengins" (7.16). Two Blengins, one a human-headed Dorthorean (in yellow), the other a young Tuskorhorian (in red), are circling in the sky. Into this composition, Darger has introduced a cut-out of a beautiful little girl: a sepia photograph which he evidently found and spontaneously incorporated into his picture. He has given the child blond hair and tinted her dress in pale yellow to match. She stands with her back to a balustrade, seemingly unaware of the friendly monsters stealing up behind her. Undoubtedly, she initially represented, for Darger, one of the Vivian girls. But then, a strange transformation occurred. A pair of wings, also yellow, but with red, white, and blue striped edges, appears silhouetted against the sky. These wings must originally have been intended to belong to the small red Tuskorhorian who peers around the balustrade, but they are in the wrong position for him, and can only be understood as having their point of origin on the child's shoulders. As a result, and possibly by accident, the human child is transformed into a winged being, an angel, or perhaps an early form of human-bodied Blengin. It is not impossible that we are witnessing here the origin of a child-bodied Blengin, through a process of all but automatic, and markedly dreamlike, pictorial free association. In time, Darger would come to feel perfectly comfortable depicting innocent child Blengins attired in party dresses, shoes, and socks.

This new process of anthropomorphization, with its reliance on borrowed and traced images, obviously encouraged Darger to incorporate more and more parts of the bodies of children into his evolving conception of Blengins. The addition of the first human head to a Blenglomenean serpent led irresistibly to the marvelous later Blengins possessed of the full body of a little girl. In the final stages of the evolution, the process ultimately led to a curious breakdown of the distinction between little girls and Blengins. What we appear to be witnessing is an astonishing psychological process, occurring over many years, in which the Blengin as phallus (the source of sexual drive, of aggression, and, for Darger, the traumatic object of his early sexual experiences) is replaced by or, more correctly, merged with little girls, the object and goal of his libidinal impulses. Beginning as a split-off and independent flying phallus, the Blengin evolves into a little girl, unique in possessing a short but powerful tail, horns, and wings.

The Blengins of the Collage-Drawings

Blengins appear with far greater frequency in the collage-drawings which illustrate *The Realms* than they do in the written text. They often turn up in the large pictures without any apparent reason, simply as companions of the little girls who they have now grown to resemble so closely. As in the writings their presence in a scene is a sign that a shift into the irrational is occurring, as reality is invaded by flying "children" with naked bodies and spectacular wings. Without them, the war-torn landscapes of *The Realms* would be grim indeed. The exuberant forms, patterns, and radiant hues of their open wings fill Darger's brooding skies with explosive colors, shapes, and movement, while their fantastically ornamented tails bloom like flower gardens on the ground. In that all the pictorial Blengins now possess children's bodies, or at the very least partial human anatomy, scenes in which they appear tend to have a far larger cast of characters than we are accustomed to, with floating bodies in the sky added to those of the children and Blengins on the ground below. Compositions with dozens of figures are now common, displaying a level of formal complexity surpassing anything Darger had ever attempted previously⁹⁷ (7.17).

While the Vivian girls, and other children as well, appear from time to time in the drawings without their clothes (more frequently than strict conformity to the text would require), child Blengins are almost always depicted naked. The gymnastic extremes of their unrestrained body positions and movements, flying, floating, descending, swinging, running, etc., lend these vaguely human creatures a vastly increased sensual, even erotic, significance, differentiating them from the well-behaved, slightly prim manner of the earth-bound children. Part of nature rather than civilization, Blengins are wild beings, needing to be tamed, their horns and tails a reminder of their animal nature and their potential for violence. But, while Darger insists on the extraordinary power and aggressiveness of those Blengins possessing human form, the acquisition of children's bodies by the Blengins in the drawings actually seems to have mitigated their murderous tendencies and rendered them relatively harmless, at least in appearance. The astonishing violence which occasionally accompanies their appearance in the writings is, with a number of notable exceptions, replaced in the illustrations by innocent charm and mild eroticism, with latent sexual fantasy finding its way to the surface in place of murderous rage. It is possible that Darger's move from writing to drawing and painting was prompted by, and reflected, a major shift in his internal economy. A change in psychological state and in mood is implied by his new absorption in the gentler world of child Blengins, and their small human friends.

Blengin Bodies

The naked bodies of Blengins are traced, like all of Darger's drawings of children, from borrowed pictorial sources, in fact from exactly the same enlarged and traced images used in depicting children. Again and again, we encounter images of children we have come to recognize, now adapted to depict the bodies of child Blengins. The "little girl with a pail," or the "little girl in a polka-dot dress sitting on a fence," appear, over and over again, as Blengins, modified by the simple addition of wings, horns, and tail. Darger employs the same photographic enlargements used to draw the Vivian girls and their friends in this new context, though with different attributes and arranged in far more dramatic orientations in space. Since, for the most part, Blengins don't wear clothes, he was restricted to those images which he felt able to modify by redrawing them without clothing. This was easily done, except for one part of the body, the feet. The task of removing shoes and drawing bare feet in their place may have represented too much of a demand on his limited technical abilities, and so Blengins now appear naked, but wearing shoes and socks.

The bodies of most of the child Blengins derive from pictures of little girls, though little boys occasionally undergo the same process of modification. The Blengins of the illustrations possess every possible style and color of hair seen in Darger's little girls, and he displays the same obsessional preoccupation with emphatic shading of hair. Unreality is suggested by the fact that their skin color can differ radically from that of normal children. On occasion, the dominant color of the tail extends over the entire body surface, and, as a

7.20

Henry Darger

Untitled [Blengin with elaborate tail added]. Tracing drawing. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. © 1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



result, blue, green, red, or yellow Blengins are frequently encountered. However, many Blengins, despite the intense color of their wings and tails, have bodies and faces which are unpainted and so appear to be white-skinned. Blengins carefully tinted in human skin tone are not unknown.

LIKE ALL of Darger's little girls, child Blengins, while otherwise female, possess male genitals. Because of their more active poses (Blengins almost never stand in a frontal pose, with their legs together), the genital is more frequently visible. Although the tails of child Blengins undergo extraordinary elaboration and development, the penis retains its generally discreet character, seldom raising its head except in situations of violent movement. In one drawing, a little boy and girl are seen walking together. The boy's hair is short, and he is clearly male. Both children possess enormous extended steers' horns, and both have clearly defined male genitals. No wonder it is notoriously difficult to determine the sex of Blengins!

Blengins, of course, differ in size from children, radically in the writings, less so in the illustrations. The Blengin whose body extends for miles across the sky is now forgotten, the long "whip-lash" or "ribbon" tail replaced by a rather shorter version suitable for attachment to the human body. In the collage-drawings Darger makes a serious effort to depict Blengins as significantly larger than children, or even adults, at the same time using shifts in scale to suggest spatial depth. He reserved his largest tracings for the bodies of these winged creatures. Occasionally very large figures fill the whole height of the sheet. Still larger ones are shown cut off at the waist by the lower edge of the composition (7.18). To draw these Blengins he

made use of traced figures far larger than anything he was able to obtain from photographic processes. The largest of his drawings (31 inches x 126 inches) are almost invariably compositions involving very large child Blengins as the principal figures. In other instances no attempt is made to differentiate species on the basis of size.

Blengin Tails

To make up for the loss of length, the tails of child Blengins undergo surprising elaboration. The tail itself now frequently resembles the stubby tail of a crocodile. There is a lot of variation in color and pattern, and the elongated form is occasionally segmented, and enriched with scales or breathing holes (7.19). The main area of emphasis and invention is the end of the tail, which is now equipped with fantastic balls, rattlers, or swollen flower or budlike appendages of considerable size. The spherical forms look like beach balls, striped in various hues, with each segment marked off by raised fins. Occasionally, Darger employed a series of such forms in diminishing sizes, providing a subtle crescendo indicative of the tail's triumphant termination. A large number of separate studies exist, elaborate independent drawings of the tail's termination, carefully drawn in pencil (7.20). Once a satisfactory "ending" had been arrived at Darger would use it repeatedly, using tracings to insert it where needed. The opposite end of the tail is inserted between the buttocks in a manner both convincing and suggestive.⁹⁸



7.17

Henry Darger

Blengiglomeans displaying their wings to show their beautiful colors. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, and collage on paper. 24 x 109 in. Anthony Petullo Collection, Milwaukee. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



7.18

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. The Blengins stay under shelter. Collage-drawing. 24 x 109 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



7.19

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Arrested or Captured by the Enemy Again.
Collage-drawing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The tails of child Blengins provide their fundamental means of defense and attack, the poisonous teeth and elongated fangs of the dragon-form Blengin having disappeared completely. The elaborate horns don't seem to be useful in battle. The occasional destructiveness of the child Blengins of the drawings is the result of effortless activity on the part of their tails, of which they themselves hardly seem to be aware. Their violent attacks on adult Glandelinians are funny rather than deadly (7.22). Glandelinian foes are tossed to the ground or into the air by a single blow, or their legs are shown entangled in the creature's coils. Darger relished depicting evil Glandelinians in a state of confusion and terror, whirling in the air, feet up, hands down, all but permanently suspended in the sky. Overlapping figures in gray uniforms spin in different directions like the hands of a clock. Dead soldiers lie sprawled on the ground, while the living drop their guns and flee in terror. Yet, in these drawings, there is no real violence on the part of the Blengins: heads don't come off, no one is dismembered or disemboweled, and there is little blood. In short, Blengiglomenean violence, even that of the powerful child Blengins, isn't even remotely in the same league as the sadistic cruelty of the Glandelinians (7.23).

Blengin Horns

From the very beginning, Blengiglomenean serpents possessed horns, some even boasting huge antler systems. The most familiar of the horned Blengins is the Tuskorhorian, whose name is derived from his forward-pointing, spearlike horns (see illustration 7.9). With the invention of human-headed Blengins Darger was faced with the unique problem of developing horns suitable for attachment to children's heads. While he arrived at a number of convincing solutions, the finest by far was the addition of enormous ram's horns which enclose the entire head in their enormous spiral. One of his most sophisticated graphic inventions, the merging of these complex traced horns with the human head, in various sizes and positions, was accomplished with astonishing subtlety. The original photographs of the animals still survive, along with the tracings which enabled him to remove and isolate their horns, relocating them in forward- or backward-pointing positions on a child's head (7.21). Photographic enlargements of the horns enabled him to adapt them to larger human heads. He obviously took pride in the skill which enabled him to create a totally convincing hybrid image, a near perfect union of man and animal (7.24). It is these horned beings with human faces which dominate the illustrations of *The Realms*, yet no such ram-horned Blengins are mentioned in the writings. It would seem, therefore, that they were a later invention.

The collage-drawings include a number of other kinds of horns: broad-spreading steer horns, and even variations on the Tuskorhorian horn adapted to the human head. Younger Blengins are characterized by tiny pointed horns, just sprouting and all but invisible between the locks of hair. Baby Blengins possess no horns at all. One of Darger's more surprising inventions is a form of child-headed Blengin whose curved ram's or steer's horns are terminated by small balls added to both tips. On one occasion, one Blengin turns to another and says, "You forgot the horn balls?"⁹⁹

One wonders whether in these Blengin drawings we are dealing with psychological processes involving overdetermination, with the ram's horns serving as an additional assertion of a desperately needed fact, the presence of male genitals on little girls or, more specifically, an emphatic denial of their absence. Despite the size and decorative beauty of the various kinds of horns, they are not used in fighting, and don't seem to function beyond serving as one of the essential means of differentiating between human children and child Blengins. They are simply a strangely expressive outgrowth of the Blengiglomenean mind.

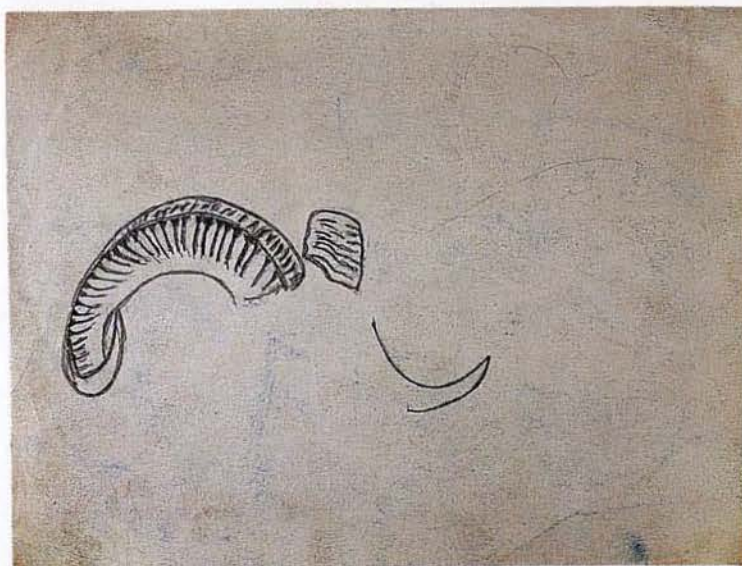
Blengin Wings

The fundamental characteristic of all Blengiglomenean serpents is their ability to fly. Given Darger's profound love of the sky and its constantly changing moods, of clouds, and storms, lightning and the gigantic funnels of tornadoes, it would not be surprising to discover that his first "sighting" of Blengins was of their flying high in the sky. Possibly their origin in fantasy was connected with his own longing to fly, to escape and to be free. The wish to fly is frequent in childhood, and the exhilarating experience of flying in dreams is familiar both to children and adults. The sheer magic of lifting off from the earth and of wheeling unrestrained in the open air is one of the most intense experiences given to us by our dreams.¹⁰⁰ Darger would have been aware in childhood of the first attempts at powered flight, and he was certainly intrigued by the idea of flying in huge balloons, occasionally including them through collage in his pictures.¹⁰¹ He was particularly aware of the ability of spiritual beings, angels, devils, dragons, to fly unaided through the sky. The only necessity was wings.

Few artists in history have concerned themselves so intensely with the creation of wings.¹⁰² Blengins provided Darger with an excuse for drawing and painting wings of every kind, shape, color, and decorative pattern imaginable. Wings were an invitation to wild and unrestrained invention. In depicting Blengiglomenean wings he moved into the unrestricted freedom of pure abstraction; in terms of creative freedom it was almost like flying. Nothing held him back, even his supposed inability to draw failed to intimidate him when it came to representing the infinite variety of possible wings. Not that he didn't study the various possibilities available to him. Here too he sought out pictorial sources which he could trace: butterfly wings, the wings of bats, dragon wings, and those of various birds (7.25). He invariably responded with intense interest to imaginative portrayals of human figures with wings. These were usually cut out and incorporated in his pictures. He introduced a host of cut-out birds into his compositions, using collage as a means of relocating them in his otherworldly skies. He studied the patterns of their feathers, and produced enormous feathered wings capable of supporting the bodies of huge Blengins in flight. Pairs of wings, both open and closed, became an essential identifying characteristic of his imaginary animals, and a richly expressive addition to the human bodies of child Blengins. It is the rainbow spectrum of their vast wings which lifts these young creatures out of the mundane world of childhood. One of the essential tests of unreality is certainly the ability to fly. The Vivian girls, for all their supernatural accomplishments, remain earth-bound. In *The Realms*, only the Blengins possess this ultimate God-given freedom.

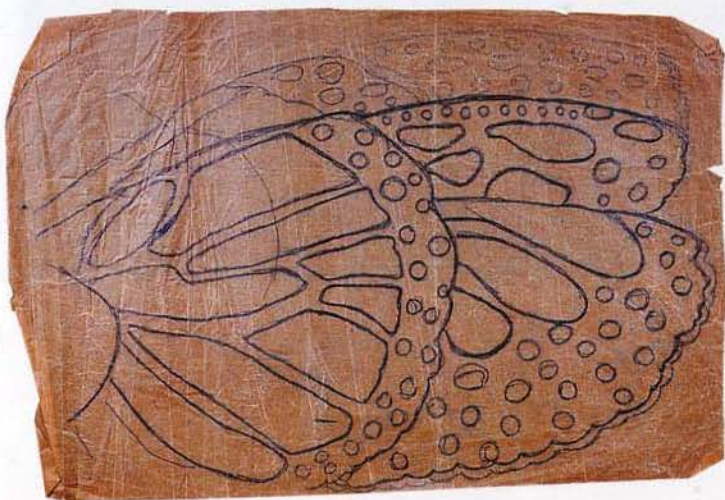
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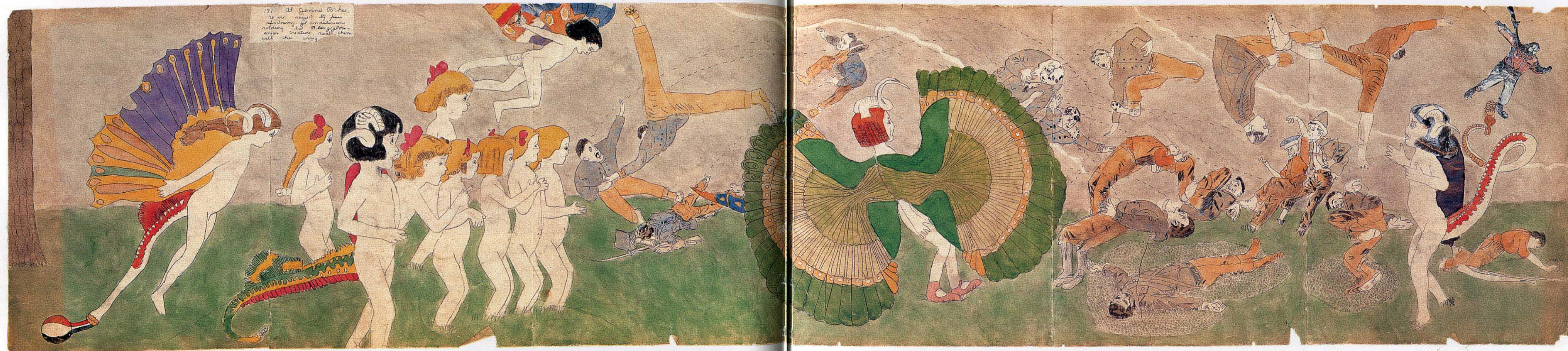
Henry Darger
Untitled [Pair of
ram's horns]. Tracing
drawing. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



7.25

Henry Darger
Untitled [Pair of
wings]. Tracing
drawing. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

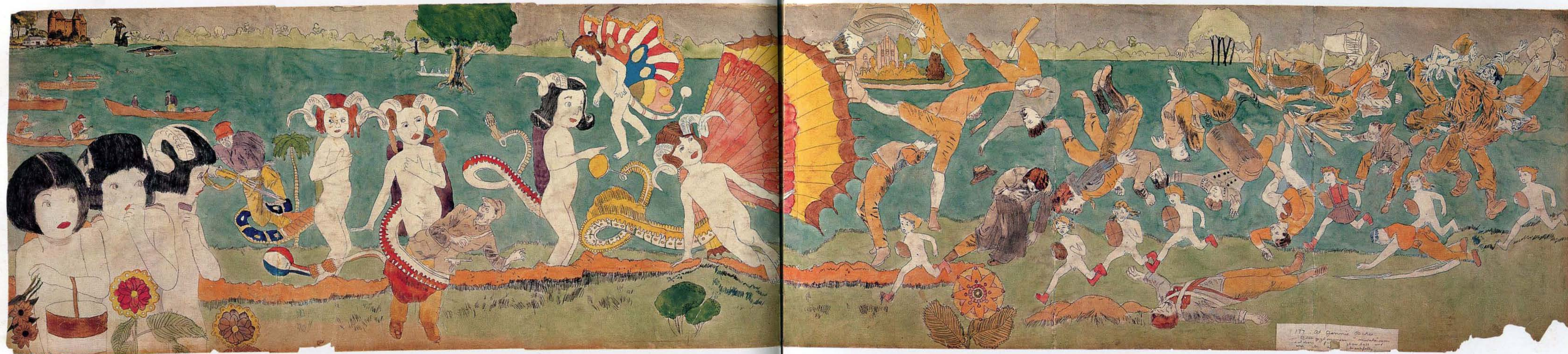




7.22

Henry Darger

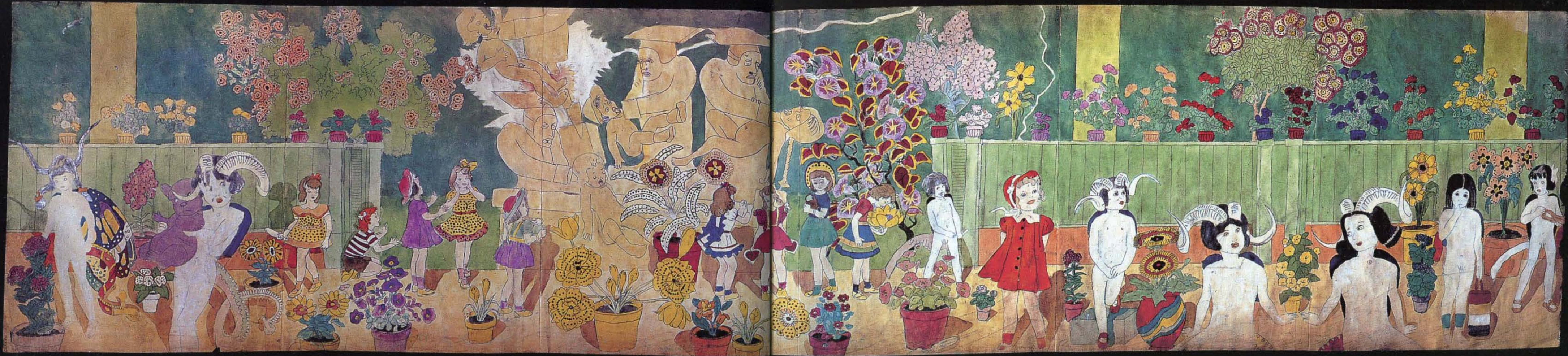
131 At Jennie Richee. Were seized by shadowing Glandelinian soldiery but Blengiglomenean creature swats them with her wing. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, and collage fragments on paper. 23 1/2 x 116 in. Collection of Robert M. Greenberg, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



7.23

Henry Darger

137 At Jennie Richee, Blengiglomeneans "mistake" some soldiers for a baseball and uses its wings beautifully. 24 x 109 in. Collection of John and Margaret Robson, Washington. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



7.24

Henry Darger

Untitled [Statues of Glandelinians strangling children struck
by lightning], 24 x 108 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

390

Wings are a powerful symbol of the imagination let loose, the ultimate denial of the restraints imposed by our human existence. It was wings which carried Darger as a boy into the unrestrained freedom of the Realms of the Unreal. In his depiction of endlessly varied and elaborately decorated wings one senses the intensity of his passionate quest for another world: his wish to lift himself out of his mundane existence, his search for that ultimate freedom which only wings and flight can give.

Blengins in the Garden

Inevitably perhaps, the creation of Blengiglomenean serpents burdened with fully human bodies tended to bring these vast creatures of the sky, and of the underworld, closer to earth. The Blengins, familiar to us in Darger's writings largely as mature animals, seem, in the illustrations, to grow ever younger. Blengins with children's bodies are unavoidably perceived, by the viewer, as being adolescent or even younger representatives of their species. The creatures are attracted by the Vivian girls and their friends, their earthly counterparts, and far from engaging in battle, they now wish to play. As a result, the child Blengins seem to grow ever tamer, and to linger longer on the surface of the earth.

It may be that these evolutionary changes are connected with the end of the war. It is essential to remember that Darger was not primarily a writer or an artist, but rather a participant in the great war. As long as the war continued his writing of its history could not stop. However, once *The Realms* was completed his internal war was in a very profound sense over. His decision to finally bring the book, and the war, to a conclusion must have involved a major psychological change. If, as I believe, the task of illustrating *The Realms* began after the writing was essentially complete, then it is likely that the pictures, made after the conclusion of the war, would give expression to a

markedly different mental state which might be characterized as a post-war mentality. This would be absolutely true only if internal wars could ever really be ended. Nevertheless, a considerable number of large illustrations, but by no means all, do seem to reflect a post-war situation in the Realms, a group of pictures which I have come to think of as the "Blengins in the Garden."¹⁰³ In *The Realms* Darger speaks only briefly of the situation after the war, when the Vivian girls return to their own country, Abbieannia, and become normal little girls once again, but he clearly had a vision in his mind of that carefree post-war world.

It seemed to Starring and his companions that the country of Abbieannia was the loveliest country in the world, for the wide glens, plains, and woods, were as a general paradise of heaven in disguise. The flowers were plentiful and what was to make the scenery still more beautiful was the appearance of many beautiful Blengiglomenean creatures every day. Violet and her sisters enjoyed the sights of so many brilliant creatures, and also enjoyed still more those two who they had invited to remain in their own private gardens.¹⁰⁴

This post-war world would seem to have been strongly present in Darger's mind during the years when he was engaged in the work of illustration. As a result, many of the great collage-drawings (and in particular the largest of them), though they may have been intended as illustrations of his

history of the Glandco-Abbieannian war, are in fact expressive of that idealized post-war world in which little children and young Blengins live in peace and joy. These pictures are largely depictions of magnificent gardens and landscape settings filled with enormous flowers, birds, small animals, and dozens of beautiful children and child Blengins. Seed catalogues provided Darger with enormous flowers and fruits with which to adorn his surreal vision of paradise. The only threat to the tranquility of this magic land is offered by violent storms, from which both children and Blengins take shelter on covered porches or even indoors.

References to the war in this group of large collage-drawings take the astonishing form of huge wooden statues, sculpted depictions of Glandelinian officers strangling children (7.24 and 7.26). These three-dimensional images of the Glandelinian reign of terror are seen being dragged around on wheeled carts, smashed to pieces, burned, or carried about as broken fragments by the children, a last reminder of the horrors of time past. To the children, now dwelling in the gardens and returned to childhood, these monuments are merely funny.

"Why do Glandelinians make these freak things?" "A Glandelinian choking me, a winged Blengin with the strength of a 1000 men, despite my size and age? Ha!" "You want to buy one of them? Tee Hee." "Why do these wicked Glandelinians make these things, you ask? Because they really do it to real children. Funny, ain't they though? Tee Hee."¹⁰⁵

The Blengiglomenean serpents, some of whom now live in the gardens of Abbieannia as the children's pets, have a curious tendency to merge physically with the human children and to lose much of their distinct identity as Blengins. Like the Vivian girls, now deprived of their aggressive function as participants in a world at war, the Blengins too seem to revert to childhood, slowly changing from monstrous creatures of the imagination back into innocent children. These child Blengins, though they can still fly, prefer to enjoy the exciting movement of the children's swings. They often appear with toys: teddy bears, balls, pictures, or pail and shovel. One Blengin actually is seen building a sandcastle. Darger's beloved "little girl with a pail" now appears frequently as a Blengin. On one occasion, she is identified as "Mable Normandy," a Blengin with a human name.

The Blengins interact with the children in various ways; they talk or look at things together and even exchange gifts. While actual physical contact between children and their serpent friends is rare, there is at least one occasion where a Blengin tightly hugs a little girl in his arms. They also appear with the children in elaborate interior scenes. As tame animals, and friends, they can now come into the house (7.27 and 7.28).

Most surprising, having embraced civilization, child Blengins now occasionally appear wearing clothes. Their horns or tail may, on occasion, fall away in the process. While they generally still have wings, more often than not the wings are folded, appearing as a narrow colored band running alongside of their arms, or as a tiny colored bump on each shoulder. Reminders of their once powerful sails, these vestigial wings are now only a sign of that "other world" to which these tamed child Blengins belong no more.

Darger was aware of this curious transformation, and of the tendency of his child Blengins to blend in with the children. Toward the end of the war he describes an attempted massacre, in which the Glandelinians meet a terrible fate because of their failure to differentiate between their child victims and the Blengiglomenean enemy.



7.26

Henry Darger

Untitled [Children pulling on wheeled statues of Glandelinians].
Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on
paper. 24 x 108 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

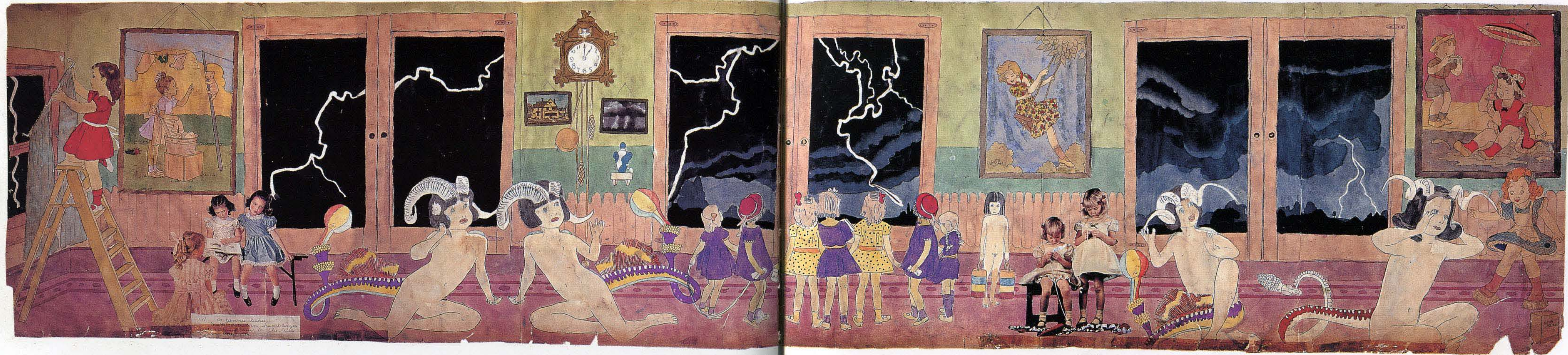


7.27

Henry Darger

While inside they await developments. Collage-drawing.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Darger obviously relished the fact that even the Vivian girls could be fooled by Blengins who were so much like children as to be mistaken for them. In the collage-drawings, and especially those with garden settings, he plays very consciously with such confusion. In one picture he repeatedly traced the now famous *Girl in a Polka-dot Dress sitting on a Fence*, depicting her nine times [7.29]. The little group of identical figures are seated on benches. All of them are wearing orange frocks with red polka dots and sashes. All have blond hair, except for one who has brown hair and sports a pair of enormous ram's horns — clearly a Blengin. Darger used this device again and again, often in groups of nine, to the point that one begins to wonder who the eight little girls and one Blengin may be. Because the child Blengins frequently wear clothes it becomes difficult to distinguish them with certainty from children. We are often reduced to searching groups of children for folded wings, or we find ourselves counting tails. With the war over the distinction between the species had apparently ceased to matter. Darger's impulse and fantasy could be satisfied by normal, fully human little girls.¹⁰⁶

The flower-filled world of the children, despite its innocence and charm, is often pervaded by a vague feeling of anxiety, an unsettling sense that all is not right. This hint of angst is reflected in the storms which suddenly sweep across the Angelinian landscape, immersing the gardens in a soft green liquid light. One of the most lovely examples of these darkened gardens is a picture entitled *At Jennie Richee. Storm continues, lightning strikes shelter but no one is injured*¹⁰⁷ [7.30]. Gathered together on a partially enclosed porch is a mixed group of nine children (including one little boy) and eight child Blengins. The two species are clearly distinguishable in this scene, in that all of the children are clothed, while the Blengins are naked.

At the center of the picture an explosive burst of white light illuminates the figures, casting dark shadows across the porch floor. The children gathered together to watch the storm don't seem disturbed by lightning striking the ground just in front of them. Strangely, it is the Blengins who, on this occasion, seem troubled, either moody or distraught. Their facial expressions, carefully redrawn by Darger, convey surprise, sadness, and even fear. A beautiful white Blengin, at left, clutches her violet teddy in her arms, her ram's horns tilted up and curiously attuned to the explosive energy of the lightning. Above her, the gorgeous wings of a flying Blengin seem to droop with sadness as she makes her awkward descent among the raindrop-flooded flowers. No longer at ease in storm-tossed skies, these child Blengins seek refuge and solace in the protected environment of the children.

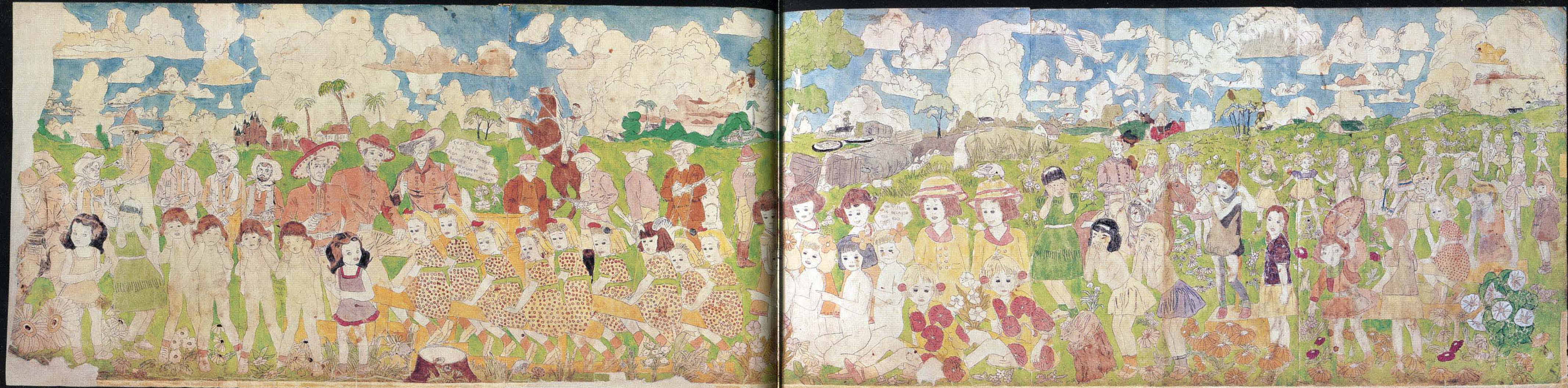
It is the brilliantly colored flowers and flowering trees which now embody nature's wildness and intensity. Unfolding like slow fireworks against the lowering sky, or spinning in their earthen pots like pinwheels, they literally buzz with electric energy and botanical excitement. Perhaps it is the ambiguous but suggestive role assigned to one of their number which has them all ablaze.

If the overt source of excitement and bodily tension in this picture is the explosion occurring just left of center, a second latent, but no less dazzling, focus of attention appears immediately below. Reclining like a Botticellian Venus, a naked Blengin displays her pubescent charms all too knowingly before our astonished eyes. Resting on her elbow, her upper body raised and turned toward us, this Blengiglomenean goddess gazes past us into infinite distance, lost perhaps in thought or in contemplation of her own beauty. No child Blengin this, but a seductive child-woman. Her languid body, momentarily illuminated by the lightning flash, glows in flesh tones of deep orange. Her breasts (for surely she has them) are invisible. The legs, crossed demurely at the ankles, partially conceal her lasciviously coiled tail, with its ornate and slightly tumescent terminal bud. Her flowing black hair, contained within the unraveling spiral of a pair of enormous ram's horns, is further adorned with roses set like burning coals in its darkness. In the hand of this nubile and knowing Venus is the long stem of a flower whose spreading petals coyly veil the mystery of her Blengiglomenean genital.

Never before has Darger come so close to adult sexuality, never before has he allowed us to glimpse the nakedness of his desire. If we removed the flower, lifted the veil, what would we find? What was the borrowed model behind this disturbingly sensuous figure?¹⁰⁸ Is it possible that, in his search for ever larger Blengin bodies, he borrowed a fragment of our ambiguous reality, unaware of the erotic overtones embodied in it? Or did he intend this explosion of sensuality at the core of his picture?

It is noticeable that the color in this carefully calculated composition loses intensity as we move from the middle of the long picture to its outer edges. This is particularly visible in the bodies of the naked Blengins, which grow dramatically paler with increasing distance from the center. Is their pallor, and their obvious unease, a response, not to the storm, but rather to a disturbing eroticism, unfamiliar and incomprehensible to Blengins? And, if so, where does Darger stand in relation to all this? Having expelled the evil and licentious Glandelinians from the garden, and from *The Realms*, was he perhaps discovering something of their monstrous reality in himself? Or are we, sophisticated observers of an innocent world, taking this momentary slip into exhibitionism far too seriously?

A superficial, but nonetheless delightful, indication of the truth of Henry's naive response to this attempt at Blengiglomenean seduction is provided by the arrival in the kindergarten of a host of unexpected visitors, collage afterthoughts added to the completed composition. Peering over and under the verandah railing, and perched on the surrounding garden wall, are a variety of cartoon birds and animals, escapees from a Disney movie. Wisecracking peeping Toms, they grin and giggle, point and leer, like adolescent boys encountering a Playboy bunny for the first time. Amazed and amused at the foibles of the human and Blengiglomenean world, they add their own chorus of squawks and hoots and howls of delight, a comic counterpoint to the darker sounds of thunder and the falling rain. This is Darger's "Tee Hee" response made visible, relieving an otherwise embarrassing moment with a spontaneous outburst of hilarity and sheer good humor.



7.29

Henry Darger

Guard those timid kids from any more danger. Those prisoners might escape again. Collage-drawing. Watercolor pencil carbon and collage fragments. 76 x 311 cm. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. Inv. 9619 (recto). ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand.



7.30

Henry Darger

172 At Jennie Richee. Storm continues. Lightning strikes shelter but no one is injured. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 24 x 108 3/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



8

NATURE IN THE REALMS

*Since I was a man
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain I never
Remember to have heard. Man's nature cannot carry
Th'affliction, nor the fear.*
—William Shakespeare¹

But has Nature — if we are justified in
personifying the laws and forces of the
universe — Has Mother Nature begun to
take sides with the Glandelinian foe, and
is she in the mood to help Glandelinia
sweep the christian countries like leaves
from her path?

—Henry J. Darger²

*... fire and water, earth and air,
combine in strange and unexpected ways;
the unseen forces are so mighty,
now demoniacal and now playful,
but showing a ceaseless activity,
full of compressed fury ...*

—From a book in Henry's library³

8.1
Henry Darger
*Robert Vivian, his
brother going near the
seashore notices ink
dark and other colored
clouds of threatening
character and of
fantastic shape
spreading over the
south-western horizon.*
Top row, third to right
of a six-panel com-
position. 22 7/8 x 16 5/8 in.
Collection de l'Art
Brut, Lausanne. CAB
11541. ©1998 Kiyoko
Lerner. Photograph
by Claude Bornand.



The great epic that is *The Realms* opens with what seems a curiously irrelevant, though tragic, event, a freak storm which destroys the city of Pandora, Abbieannia. Set on Easter Sunday of 1841, long before the birth of the Vivian sisters, Darger's account of the wild Spirian Tearian Typhoon serves as a "natural" prologue to the war, as well as a dramatic introduction to the two Christian generals who will serve as the political representatives of the forces of goodness and decency throughout the story: Robert Angelic Vivian (Governor of Abbieannia) and Hanson Angelic Vivian, his brother (Governor of Calverinia).⁴ It is through Robert's eyes that we first see the approaching storm.

Tward the afternoon at two o'clock when the heat wave had reached its height, being near a hundred and fifty, when his wife went to a tea party, Robert Vivian his brother, going near the beach of the Southern Seashore, noticed a sudden changing of the atmosphere, and that the wind had changed to four directions in four minutes, then back to south. Then all of a sudden while the atmosphere became oppressively quiet Robert noticed ink dark threatening storm clouds of fantastic colors and shapes spreading over the south-western horizon, with amazing animation. Darker and darker became the ponderous globular avalanches of clouds, which though purple in color at first became of an inky hue, or exactly looked like smoke, while a strange ominous booming roar was heard along the distant horizon in that direction.⁵

It is fitting that Darger's prelude to *The Realms* takes place in the sky. From the beginning, nature participates in the narrative, though Darger's vision is of a nature strangely transformed, with bizarre, almost hallucinatory phenomena troubling the heavens. In a text which, at moments, betrays a certain naiveté in its handling of characters, his description of the "ink dark threatening storm" reveals an unusual attentiveness to atmospheric effects and a shockingly original expressive style.

This is precisely the character of the pictorial style of the illustrations Darger created to depict the opening pages of his book (8.1). At this early stage in the process of illustration he remained very faithful to his text, depicting an isolated and lonely Robert Vivian "near the seashore."⁶ Dressed in the red-and-purple uniform worn by Christian soldiers in his personal army, he gazes out over a mirror-calm green sea. Both the rigid figure with his back to us and the simple landscape suggest the innocent style of the naive artist. But, as in the text, it is the clouds with their "fantastic colors and shapes spreading over the southwestern horizon," which carry us far beyond the confines of naive art, into realms which truly are those of the unreal. The main subject of the small painting is the luminous sky, with its weird clouds reflected in the transparent water below. The two, oddly dissimilar, cloud formations in their extraordinarily bizarre, even irrational, forms and colors transform what would be nature into a hauntingly subjective vision of approaching doom. At right, a small heap of golden-yellow clouds hover just above the sea. Their lower surfaces shadowed with the deepest purple, they are palely duplicated in the still water below. The transition, from yellow through white

to violet, is handled with amazing skill, suggestive of the soft and nebulous substance of which clouds, and visions, are formed.

The dark, truly massive cloud bank at left, the heart of the approaching storm, seems more solid, like a huge beached whale resting on the horizon. Darger has struggled to find a means of transforming these solid hills of deep blue-black into the awesome spectacle of "ponderous globular avalanches of clouds." The shapes he arrived at, twisted calligraphic ribbons of black, gray, even gold; ornate fish-scale textures and puffy contours; and the vast halo of glowing light which surrounds the whole, are powerfully original and unsettling, so weird that if one were to see them in the sky they would strike terror in the heart.⁷ These strange formal inventions are, I believe, expressive of subjective experiences within the mind of the innocent observer, rather than of external forms seen in nature, and this is typical of the role which nature, poetically transformed, will play in *The Realms*.

Despite numerous references to its speed, Darger's storm approaches with paralyzing slowness, allowing plenty of time for General Vivian to contemplate the end.

At this moment Robert Vivian chanced to glance up, and beheld in its approach an appalling canopy of crimson clouds spreading over the sky near the zenith, and moving forward with the most amazing rapidity. It had a resemblance as if the judgement day, and hell's immense clouds, had come at the very same time, and the very clouds seemed to roar in the most relentless rage with the continuous roar

of rolling thunder growing louder and nearer every moment the rage of the approaching storm seeming to defy anybody, even the heavens, and the dull boom of the windstorm itself in the distance was more plainly audible ...

Robert noticed the action of the great typhoon clouds and realized that it was a wild Spirian Tearian typhoon.

As Robert wisely took refuge as it moved over the city his experience of the storm, unlike that of this brother, was somewhat limited,

From the direction it came he knew that his brother Hanson would fail to rescue his wife and daughter in time, and he himself was in the greatest peril. In the dazzling blaze of lightening Robert saw an open man hole in the street into which he jumped and just in time for the storm was now passed through with a fury that no one could describe correctly ... the city of Pandora became a roaring hell of destruction.

THE FATE OF HANSON VIVIAN on what Darger describes as "a forlorn and sad Easter Sunday" was to be tragically different. As we approach the heart of darkness, within Hanson himself, we begin to encounter strange parallels with Henry's own experience and that of his father. The terrifying reality which they share is expressed in the symbolic language of nature transformed. For Hanson too, the sky represents a mode of feeling, a barometer responsive to rapidly shifting internal states.

It was about thirty minutes to five when I saw a purple portent in the southwest as black as ink which was surprisingly parabolic at the advancing edge. First

believing it nothing at all, I paid no attention to it, but continued my supper with my wife and daughter. A strange darkness unusual than anything that I have ever seen before since living in Abbieannia, gathered quickly, attracting me and as I looked out of the window again, and in that direction, to my horror saw a purple cloud, at the front, and a black portent under the western sky, and southern, reaching clear to the zenith in the fashion of two immense clouds in the form of two immense wings each trying to race the other, and move in two directions, all being the color of ink, and which was advancing over the city with indescribable speed, spreading and expanding in the most appalling manner, and in a few minutes the city had been involved in its frightful blackness, a dreadful, unearthly, indescribable, sack cloth blackness overshadowing us entirely.

Everything was blotted from view, only an angry spot of flickering fire red light as if it were the eye of God, appeared in the southeastern horizon where a convulsive mass of blood red clouds, seemed to advance with the speed of sheet lightening. From the black mass along the southeastern horizon, and western also, angry sky splitters shot seemingly from every direction mingled with a continuous dull booming of thunder; and above the surface of the cloud seemed to dissolve as if torrents of water was being precipitated from the skies. I and my wife and child were almost prostrated with terror.⁸



8.2

Henry Darger

Emperor Hanson Vivian finds his wife and daughter among the ruins. Top row, second to right of a six-panel composition. 22 3/4 x 14 1/8 in. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. CAB 11540. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner. Photograph by Claude Bornand.

The detailed account of the storm goes on for many pages, with the fate of the city described in endless detail. Its effect on the life of Hanson Vivian is barely touched on, though it is this tragedy which lurks, unrecognized, at the heart of *The Realms*.

At four or five o'clock the storm broke with a frightful roar, one hundred million demons seemed to have been let loose, the artillery like roar of the destruction having caused all the listeners to stand appalled. A few minutes had passed in that beautiful city of Calmanrinia, and most of the inhabitants had been caught in an almost preternatural whirl of unseen forces thousands upon thousands falling dead under maelstroms of crashing timbers, while thousands upon thousands of others were scratched, bruised, or maimed in the chaos of debris that swirled and fell ...⁹

Then came the shock. The moment was terrible. Wind sheeted torrents of rain, lightening, and earsplitting thunder rolls, crashing every second combined within one general uproar, there was a roar that seemed to me ten times worse than can be heard from a great volcanic eruption, and not wind but a whirl of supernatural power, seemed to grasp thousands of buildings at every breath, and in a twinkling of an eye sent them careening into piles upon piles, of twisted chaos and wreckage.

I was literally blown out of my house and forced to turn some complete somersaults or cartwheels, and blown into a chicken house, and into a yard opposite my own home which was torn to pieces and its walls scattered about as to say ...

Thus, is all Governor Hanson Vivian could tell about this fatal disaster which had occurred on an Easter Sunday Evening. Except of finding his wife and daughter among the wreckage dead; it being the greatest disaster that Abbieannia had ever suffered in the case of all the past typhoons.

While little is said about Hanson's discovery of his wife and daughter dead amidst the wreckage, Darger did choose to illustrate this sad moment (8.2).¹⁰ Hanson stands with five other people before the ruins of his home. No bodies are visible. There is no movement. A sea of scattered gray stone separates the spectators who stand with their backs to us. In the distance pale pink buildings, walls teetering aslant, windows gaping, are silhouetted against a gray sky. Darger describes the moment.

The windstorm according to reports lasted over three quarters of an hour, but nevertheless when the next day the darkness gave way to light once more, the whole city of Calmanrinia was a mass of flattened wreckage, of buildings, the main five or six to ten story buildings being reduced to one story junk piles.

DESPITE THE UNDENIABLE reality of Darger's early and obsessional involvement with weather, his experience of typhoons was, inevitably, limited. The origin of his preoccupation with storms, blizzards, and other meteorological extremes can be dated to the final years of the nineteenth century when he still lived in Chicago with his father. It is not unreasonable to wonder about the possible source in childhood of an obsessional interest in weather. In Darger it may well have been prompted by unconscious and defuse anxiety, and a need

for reassurance and control. While it is impossible to doubt the power of his imagination, the passionate intensity evident in his description of the Easter Sunday storm of 1841 forces us to wonder about the kinds of real experience underlying his grim and frightening account of the destructive force of nature on the rampage. It is to be expected of this uniquely driven and compulsive form of creativity that autobiographical truth frequently lies concealed beneath its fictional exterior.¹¹ In the case of this event, a model is fortunately close at hand: the famous Easter Day Cyclone of April 12, 1903, which passed close to Lincoln, on Henry's birthday, shortly before his arrival at the town's Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children.¹²

Despite his later preoccupation with hurricanes or tornadoes striking orphanages, and blowing all their inhabitants to hell and gone, it does not seem probable that his obsession with destructive storms can be explained by the traumatic impact of accounts of a cyclone.¹³ Rather, what I want to suggest is that the cyclone of 1903 was of unique importance to Henry, not as a traumatic event, but as a screen memory.¹⁴ Its significance resided, not in its destructive force, but in its date, Easter Sunday. This was so, not because of its connection with his birth, but because of its immediate association with death and loss. For Henry, Easter Sunday was inevitably, though unconsciously, linked with a truly traumatic experience, the death of his mother and the loss of his baby sister, on Wednesday April 1, four days before Easter Sunday, April 5, 1896. Because of this major holiday in the Catholic Church, his mother's burial was postponed to the following Monday, April 6. Whether Henry attended her funeral and burial is not

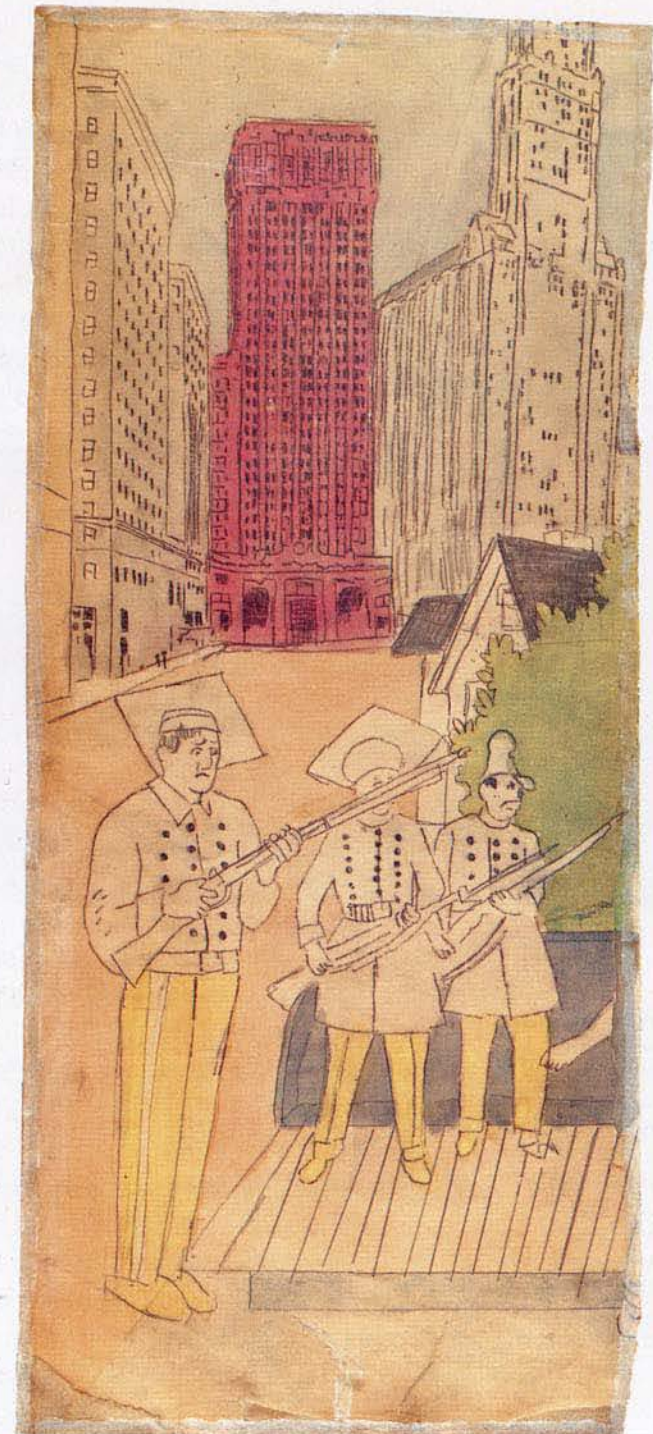
known. What is certain is that, shortly after, all memory of his mother, and of these terrible events, were lost to him.¹⁵

Roughly a decade and a half later, when he sat down to write the opening pages of *The Realms*, these repressed memories surfaced in disguised form. Concealed in the fictional prelude to the story is an account of the terrible events which shaped his later life. Embodied in the description of the overwhelming storm which destroyed Hanson Vivian's life, his home, his wife and daughter, is not only his own experience of loss, but that of his father, Henry senior. Significantly, Darger as a child of four had to cope, not only with the loss of his mother and sister, but with his father's overwhelming grief. His own experience at that time is fully embodied, and concealed, in the image of the storm and its destructive forces. Not surprisingly, he uses images of rage to characterize the typhoon. But, in the figure of Hanson Vivian, it is the veiled, and undoubtedly unconscious, memory of his father, stunned and overcome with grief and loss, which surfaces.¹⁶ For Henry, Easter must always have been a troubling and anxiety-ridden time, without his knowing why. Less easily explained is why this complex of repressed memories should, almost immediately after the event, have found unconscious expression in an obsessional preoccupation with weather and with violent natural phenomena.

8.3

Henry Darger

Untitled [Glandelinian soldiers in downtown Chicago]. Collage-drawing fragment. 9 3/4 x 22 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The Real and the Unreal in *The Realms*

Although Darger lived for most of his life in urban Chicago, with his experience of nature, after his boyhood in Lincoln, limited to the city's parks and waterfront areas, nature and natural phenomena play a dominant role in *The Realms*, and in *The History of My Life*. The majority of the collage-drawings also depict events taking place out of doors in landscape settings. Occasional scenes are set in interiors, usually individual rooms. While very few events are depicted in cities or even small towns, a small fragment exists which depicts Glandelinian soldiers on a visit to downtown Chicago [8.3].

Despite the presence of palm trees and occasional giant flowers, the landscape of *The Realms* is generally recognizable as that in the area around Lincoln, Illinois, and between Lincoln and Chicago; that is, the landscape through which Darger wandered on his all too brief period of freedom in the summer of 1909. The huge expanse of farmland with occasional rolling hills, the deep space crossed by meandering streams and rivers, and especially the vast skies filled with constantly changing panoramas of clouds and storms, with jagged lightning zigzagging across the heavens, seem to have embedded themselves permanently in his memory, shaping his pictorial imagination and his ideal image of the beauty of nature. Still earlier, his love of the changing effects of light, of dramatic skies and storms of rain or snow, would have been inspired by the view from the window of his father's house.¹⁷ In short, his conception of nature was, in part, derived from a limited but intense experience of the real world.

However, it is absolutely impossible to account for his obsessional preoccupation with floods and forest fires, with earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, or strange explosions, all of vast extent and destructive impact, on the basis of his personal experience of nature. And it is destructive natural events on an immense, even irrational, scale that characterize most of the lengthy descriptions of nature run wild which fill *The Realms*. It is unmistakably true that most of the more than 15,000 pages comprising this enormous work contain detailed descriptions of the destructive effects of nature out of control. Not even the thousands of pages filled with elaborate accounts of warfare and massacres can compare in extent to the prolonged, and recurrent, descriptions of natural calamities.¹⁸ Though it is also true that many of the disastrous natural events appear to have been caused by man, once unleashed they take over and dominate the realms of the unreal, often in strange combinations of fire and flood, blizzards, storms and battle, tidal waves and unexplained explosions of enormous destructive force. It is in this sense that nature may be said to participate in the war, and in the comparatively short interval of human and natural history which Darger sought to portray.

"Mother Nature," as an allegorical representative of powerful abstract forces, does figure in *The Realms*, and elsewhere in Darger's writings, functioning at least some of the time almost in opposition to, or at the very least independent of, God. Even in creating the Realms of the Unreal, Darger could not conceive of a world in which the Christian God was not present and supposedly in control. His failure to exert that control, even in regard to natural events and forces, deeply

puzzled Henry. This raised serious moral and religious issues in Darger's mind, which plagued him for most of his life. We will turn to the problem of evil, both in history and in nature, at a later point in our discussion (chapter 12), but here it should not be forgotten that issues raised by the uncontrolled violence, both of natural forces and mankind, lie at the very heart of Darger's writing and his struggle to understand.

It would be of interest to examine the enormous part played by nature in *The Realms*, and in Darger's drawings, but our particular concern is with the function of natural events in his inner world. To a remarkable extent nature and the weather, in the Realms of the Unreal, is an externalization of the climate of shifting mental states within Darger's psyche, his chief means of self-expression and of feeling. As we explore this curious symbolic mechanism, two distinct, and to some extent incompatible, functions emerge from the strange convergence of powerful forces loose in nature and in the mind. It is impossible to overestimate the extent of Darger's preoccupation both with actual weather and with imaginary "natural" events. Weather was his chief, some say his only, topic of conversation, and the sole subject of the "Weather Books" which he kept on a daily basis for so many years.¹⁹ The detailed description of a vast range of natural events, occurring in reality and in *The Realms*, provided one of the most important outlets for his extraordinary intellect. Paradoxically, these descriptions of strangely "unnatural" natural events also served as a crucially important mode of experiencing and expressing otherwise inaccessible feelings. Much of the time it seems as if Darger remained unaware of what he was feeling, with emotion surfacing largely in symbolic form, often

as embodied in natural, if bizarre events occurring in *The Realms*.²⁰ While these two aspects of psychological function and experience could, on occasion, contradict and disturb each other, in combination they immeasurably enhanced and intensified Darger's vision of nature at war.

In no other aspect of Darger's creativity do we encounter the strength of his intellect more fully. Unhindered by formal education, he indulged in astonishing speculation about the workings of the physical world *in extremis*, elaborating subjective but ingenious theories designed to explore and explain natural phenomena unleashed. In his amazing discussions of sinking land masses, rivers leaving their beds, mountains exploding, flaming islands drifting through the night, and oceans cascading across the land, we encounter a mind that evokes the more nightmarish visions of Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, or William Blake.²¹ In the astonishing range of his inquiries into natural forces, in the sheer inventiveness of his uninhibited speculation, and in the symbolic function of his vision of nature's workings, we encounter an intellect of genius. Our task (in the absence of genius) will be to demonstrate the unique character as well as the extent of Darger's intellectual functioning.²²

For most of us, nature, and more precisely the weather, influences our moods. While this may or may not have been true of Darger, in his writings one observes the opposite situation. In *The Realms* nature, in all of its manifestations, is shaped by Darger's changing moods. Wildly contrasted natural events — fires, storms, floods, eruptions, and explosions — reflect quite precisely his rapidly changing mental states, his internal weather. While his intellect seems to have been employed in a vain attempt to control, or at least understand, nature and its monumental forces, his failure in the face of nature run wild is an expression of the

8.4

Henry Darger

Untitled [Glandelinian generals looking at a map of the United States]. Modified political cartoon. 11 3/4 x 15 1/2 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



terrible intensity of his emotions and his drives. This becomes most evident in his enthusiastic, indeed passionate, descriptions of the forests burning out of control, or hurricanes of fire mounting to the planets. It is no less present in the hundreds and hundreds of pages given over to descriptions of floods and storms sweeping across the land and inundating the cities. At the end of his life, the more subdued forces still alive within him found expression in the "Smoulder," strange fires burning beneath the earth of rural Illinois, and in the terrifying tornado "Sweetie Pie" which decimated its cities. And here too we encounter the speculative mind of Hendro Darger, "volcanology expert," struggling to comprehend the incomprehensible, lost in endless contemplation of the power of natural forces unleashed, or at least unhindered, by God. In these wildly subjective visions of undisciplined nature grown monstrous and murderous, we glimpse another aspect of Darger's genius, his ability to use nature as a language, and language as vision.

Maps of Unreality

One mode of depicting nature in which the intellect might be expected to dominate is the making of maps. Darger's unusual activities as mapmaker to the Realms of the Unreal are of interest in illustrating irrational factors which can enter into this seemingly straightforward and logical task. He collected a number of real maps, and understood their function as a means of locating natural features and cities, and of defining the territory of political entities.²³ He was particularly interested in maps showing the distribution of military forces in disputed territories, or in specific battles. His

studies of American Civil War history brought him into contact with numerous maps illustrating particular moments in this war. Characters in *The Realms*, both good and evil, are constantly consulting what he describes as "geography maps," and efforts are frequently made to steal those maps understood to reveal the enemy's plans for future military activity²⁴ [8.4].

Regrettably, Darger does not seem to have drawn an overall map depicting the territories of the various nations which together compose the Realms of the Unreal, but he did draw a number of partial maps laying out specific parts of this complex other world: the McWhirthian Seas and the Blengiglomenean and Boyking Islands, or a "Map of Jullo Callio and the series of battles around her."²⁵ It must be admitted that, in reading the texts it is terribly difficult to obtain an accurate and understandable picture of the Realms, of the distribution of the major nations, Abbieannia, Angelinia, Calverinia, and Glandelinia, of which they are composed. Despite endless clues concerning their spatial relations and common borders, it would require an unusually acute sense of geography to picture the layout of their territories, and their relation to the other smaller nations and the surrounding seas.²⁶

Darger's finest map combines natural features, mountains, rivers, etc., the location of various cities, and the distribution of opposed armies, on the occasion of a specific battle [8.5]. The title, inscribed on the map itself, explains its intended purpose:

Map of Angelinia Agathia battlefield. On the left of map where hills are thickest is the general part of the titanic battle which raged for seventy to eighty four hours or three days and a half. Gen. Vivian and Manley were the hero and enemies having the biggest armies that could be imagined. The fiercest fighting of the battle occurred at Chamberlains orchard or groves, at the fatal and bloody [gap] the Parobech and Trecian Lanes, and on the Carnation ridges. The height of the carnage was in the Purabech and Forecian dunes where natures [illegible] scene all this horror carnage. The battle ended as a draw with a slight advantage for Manley.²⁷

Using crayons to create color and shading, he attempted to depict actual topographical features of the landscape, all of which are carefully named. The overall effect is confusing rather than clarifying, practical rather than artistic, and somewhat simpler in intention than the wonderful maps made by the Vivian Girls, and described in *The Realms*. Would that one of their astonishing maps had survived the war.

The Crazy Quilt Map

"At first we could not think what to start it on, but finally in searching through our chest we came across this large paper which we decided to use to draw and color the map on ... We had to patch up the map into many different colors and shape the landscapes together correctly ... You can see all of the hills are of various sizes and shapes, and the way we have completed the work it is very pretty and also gorgeous to look at. We have never made one like it, for we girls generally do not



8.5

Henry Darger

Map of Angelina

Agathia Battlefield.

24 x 69 1/2 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Photograph courtesy
of Michael Baruch.

have the time for such work so this is the biggest map we have ever made ... We call it the 'Crazy Quilt Map' because the colors, lakes and landscapes and mountains and hills and rivers and other places are so mixed up that we alone understand it and no one else. When we got this far with it I said to myself that it would do nicely for our cause and such a dreadful mixture of colors on this map would probably discourage rebel vandals from stealing it ..."

"So now the map is finished," said Hettie and Angeline. "We will show you generals what a good job we did." And she and Daisy and two others, Violet and Catherine, held it within the generals view so both could look it over carefully. Both of the generals closely examined the curious map with exceedingly great wonder not alone mingled with some great curiosity.

The map was three feet in width, and five feet in length, when held upright not counting the size of the sheet of paper, the ordinary sheet of paper being doubly larger.²⁸ Violet and her sisters had first made into the map beginning from the west the rivers and hills, and then they had placed in their proper spaces the cities, towns and villages necessary, and using crayons and paints to color the map with. Up on one part of the map they had originated the christian and foe positions under general Manley, and Vivian as they now were, and the directions toward which both extended. All of the important markings had been carefully made and placed and colored properly to hide their real identity.

"This map will serve our purpose splendidly when the time comes," said Angeline. The streams were of light green instead of blue as on other colored maps, and yet made as neat as when printed on the page of a geography. The landscapes were of silver hue and the hills of a chrome yellow and red combined. Violet and her sisters had puzzled themselves over the color of the lakes for some time, for ... they were important if the map was to be used so, but finally they agreed to guilt them. This plan the two generals had considered very artistic and disguising and the Vivian girls were pleased when the generals praised the map. The states they had put into the map had been colored in a crazy quilt style.²⁹

It is obviously of interest to consider the possible relationship between the mapmaking activities of the children and those of Darger himself. He delighted in the idea that the maps found in his room were, in fact, created not by him but by the children in *The Realms*. It is possible to imagine his excitement when he conceived the idea of mapping the Unreal. Was the map described at this late point in the writing of *The Realms* inspired by his involvement, at a specific moment in time, with drawing maps? It is possible that all seven maps were the result of a single outburst of map-making. Certainly some of the principles enunciated by the Vivian girls are evident in his maps, especially the attempt to represent actual features in the landscape: mountain ranges, rivers, etc. But, in the end, his map is far more conventional than the "disguised" map made by the children. It is the element of concealment that permits their

flight into wild irrationality: green water, yellow and red hills, golden lakes, and the overall landscape of "silver hue."

Perhaps Darger's career as a maker of maps was brought to an end by his dissatisfaction with the artistic results of his crayon maps. Even the Vivian girls seem uncertain about the aesthetic component of their map, with its extraordinary range of unnatural and conflicting colors.

To those who would not understand their purpose it would seem that there were too many loud and improper colors on the map for a map, and also too loud to be considered a strictly beautiful and corrective piece of work, or properly artistic for even the outside part of the paper free of the map was colored a hundred different almost very foolish and silly looking designs, while the corners of the map was colored yellow, red, blue, purple, and indigo and black, while the center was smeared a very bright yellow. It would have disgusted even themselves had they not done it to fool the Glandelinian vandals and spies. "You ought to have designed the hills all red or pink," suggested general Marcus. "I suppose we ought to have, but we did not think of it at the time," replied Violet. "Still I cannot see that it matters much now for we wish the map to be rather useful than just for a regular map scene. If the time comes when we don't need it any more, we can decide to destroy it ... Just the same we must not be overconfident, and must be careful not to give the spies any chance, and those around us who are perfect strangers to us, we must

keep the map from their view, and also those who are not fitted to the work we occupy. In other words we must hide the map when it is not in use."

One can imagine that Darger felt the same way. It is quite possible that the set of maps was made early on, well before the major collage-drawings. Certainly, his comments about the Vivian girls' map seem to reflect considerable uncertainty about their (and his own) artistic skills, along with attempts to rationalize their failure to produce a truly artistic product. At the same time, the element of disguise, based on the delightfully naive belief in the confusion that would be caused by the use of unnatural colors, does allow irrationality, and a wider range of emotional expression, to play more of a part in creating a map than would usually be the case. He has created a kind of map which conceals one kind of truth, while embodying another. It is interesting that, at this stage, he experienced this unnatural and expressionistic mode of making images or maps as "crazy."

In part, this was because he felt strangely uneasy about indulging in activities which he associated with children, using crayons and "coloring in." In a wonderful passage in *The Realms*, he betrays a good many of his ambivalent feelings in regard to adult map- and picture-making. The mapmaker in this case is the evil general, Raymond Richardson Federal, in dialogue with young Brigando, a Calverinian boy scout.

He [Federal] continued drawing for some time, seemingly in deep thought, and then he arose and walked to a big cupboard that stood against the wall in the

room. When the cupboard door was opened the Calverinian boy scout could indeed see a lot of small drawers inside, and into one of these drawers which he drew open, the third from the top, the general thrust in his hand and drew out some color crayons.

"Do you like to see a plan drawn plainly or in colors?" the general inquired with a smile. "It looks better," replied the lad calmly, "but I'm not sure I would like it any better." The fierce looking Glandelinian general then laughed loudly saying, "During the calm before the battle I like to make my plans in drawings as it is more interesting. But sometimes when I have nothing to do I like to color it too, as I'm fond of crayon and paint work." Brigando noticed that in his right hand he had a collection of eight colored wax crayons. He shut the cupboard door and then going to the table sat down and proceeded to color his work.

"There" the general cried "Now the plan will present a more beautiful appearance. I love to color pictures and maps and the like, just like little child simpletons do, but just the same I would tire of them if I continued it too long."³⁰

"You are a clever and good artist," said Brigando, pretending to praise him. "I did not think you could do such good color work. All you did was to rub the crayons like any child does." "Oh, do you think so indeed?" he replied. "Well, try to color the map yourself if you like, and see if you can color as good as I can."

"No" said the boy. "I don't understand crayon color work, and if I did I would not

try to imitate your skill. And besides I'm likely to spoil your work. You're not only a wonderful general, but also a wonderful artist and map maker, while I am only a common boy scout messenger."

This confession seemed to please the general, who though not at all haughty or proud, yet nevertheless did sometimes like to have his doings and work appreciated ...

He started to work on his plan which he had not finished yet ... All during the afternoon he [Brigando] sat very silent. Once more general Federal went to the strange cupboard, and after thrusting in his big hand into another drawer, he took out a small box of paints and started working with that on the plans ...

Now, the boy scout Brigando had marked the size of the plan with his eyes and had concluded that the strange general had taken something else from it, that enabled him to color the map or plan in a more mysterious if not beautiful way ... "Very good" cried the general, examining the work of his own with art critical approval.³¹

I have bedimmed

*The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault*

Set roaring war.

—William Shakespeare³²

Modern men and women, at least those dwelling in cities, are largely unresponsive to the sky and to weather in general except insofar as it effects their activities. Changing effects of light or of cloud formation, slight shifts in temperature or in wind direction, barely impinge on consciousness, though they may, unperceived, have an effect on mood. For this reason, Darger's lifelong obsession with subtle and not so subtle alterations in weather and the sky, not in fantasy alone, but in his day-to-day functioning, stands out as a strange and significant aspect of his reality. Particularly in a young child such intense observation of climatic conditions would be indicative of unusual levels of anxiety. The systematic monitoring and recording of all changes in the weather, which in Darger came later, would seem to represent an attempt at control or, since weather cannot be controlled, of preparation. At the very least, he would know what was coming.

Robert Vivian's acute observation of the sky was Darger's own. What is most to be feared is a powerful storm, and since such storms can approach from within, as well as from without, the danger that menaces may be irrational, a hurricane, a cyclone, or even, and most commonly, a typhoon. In the story the children too reveal an unusual level of involvement and anxiety in regard to weather.

Evans seemed to notice the worried look on the faces of the little girls and said, "What is the matter little girls of mine? You all look as if you were worried about something? ...

"No-o-o-o." said Violet as she suddenly noticed a rolling mass of cirris cloud formation which in this country heralds a thunderstorm moving up along the horizon where the terrible roar of the battle could be heard. "I fear we are heading again in the direction of the cyclonic storm of battle. It may go bad with us if we are caught out in it among the open plains." "The horizon skies are suspicious alright." Evans remarked, glancing at the heavy smoke clouds. "It looks though from those yonder clouds that it is from the distant exploding shells but just the same though those shells make black and white smoke. I don't like the coloring of that thick mass of cirrus. And at other portions I see gray smoke clouds. And I know because I've seen it so often. That is surely from the distant battle, and the worse part at that."³³

It is obvious from his writings that Darger prided himself on his knowledge of the various aspects of nature. A mine of information, he used it as a means of maintaining minimal contact with other people who would have quickly become aware of the acuteness of his observations. Effects of nature also provided him with a rich source of fantasy and of poetic metaphor. The effect on his art, both written and pictorial, is everywhere apparent, adding an element of reality to even his most fantastic productions. Darger's dazzlingly original manipulation of color, by no means always natu-

ralistic, may, in part, originate from his obsessional involvement with changing light, color, and shape in the sky. Certainly this is true of his painted skies and his remarkable control of atmospheric effects through transparent washes of tone. His written descriptions too portray a profound awareness of nature's changing moods.³⁴

In places much further away the sky for a time was clear, the sky presenting a strangely murky aspect and the sun assuming a strange green color or green shade that can never be found in an artist's paints no matter how many green colors he may have.³⁵

The theme of a storm's approach engaged Darger's deepest emotional responses, unleashing his creative powers to a remarkable degree since it allowed him to explore the sky as subject. It is in such storm-lit landscapes that his genius as a colorist is most clearly revealed: his mastery of watercolor wash, his astonishing control of tone. One of the most poetic of these approaching storms is the collage-drawing *At Jennie Richee. Assuming naked appearance by compulsion race ahead of coming storm to warn their father* (8.6).

Through a tropical landscape curiously reminiscent of central Illinois, the Vivian girls (and a red-headed friend) flee, their naked white forms small replicas of each other, their faces subtly redrawn to suggest anxiety. Four of them carry identical yellow bundles and all of them possess tiny male genitals. There is no hint of the unknown force which made them, "by compulsion," remove their clothes. Behind them, palm trees and giant flowers lift their heavy heads into the stormy sky, exploding as if in anticipation into multicolored



8.6

Henry Darger

*At Jennie Richee. Assuming nuded appearance by compulsion
race ahead of coming storm to warn their father. Collage-drawing.*

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on assembled paper.
9 x 70 1/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum,
New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

At Jennie Richee
Assuming nuded appearance
by compulsion race ahead of
coming storm to warn their
father

blooms, pinwheels of dazzling hue and intensity resisting the oncoming darkness of the storm. As usual, Darger's greens are radiant, glowing coolly as if lit from within.

But it is the sky which is the focus of his attention, occupying fully three-quarters of this large composition. While derived from his acute sensitivity to nature, and his deep knowledge of changing atmospheric effects, it is a sky such as no one has ever seen, a symphony of subtly orchestrated transitions; from deepest gray-black at the horizon, through amazingly varied washes of deep blue-black alternating with areas of pearly gray cloud, and onto atmospheric blues in the upper reaches. Constructing his vision of the sky in horizontal layers, he creates vistas of different types of cloud form, one above the other, using tone to push them ever deeper into space, and elaborate linear convolutions to give them individual structure and personality. In creating this sequence of ever more distant cloud bands he is able to suggest the transition from the blue sky of midday, through increasing signs of atmospheric turbulence, heralded by boiling clouds taking shape in the upper atmosphere, to the ink-black darkness at the horizon which, for him, was the portent of approaching doom. The little girls flee to the left, ahead of the storm. At far right it breaks, as lightning streaks across the sky, its pale light illuminating everything below. Through such scenes it becomes apparent to what extent nature in all her moods was the subject of his art, color and light the source of his pictorial magic. While seeking to depict the Unreal, and to embody his inner world with its dark forces erupting with the suddenness of summer storms, he drew on nature in all of her richness and reality to provide his fantasy with a backbone of fact.

On occasion Darger is equally able to write convincingly, and with superb objectivity, of nature's sudden moods.

Puffs of cool wind swept through the fields and isolated heavy rain drops so large as to make splashes the size of plates clattered against the watchers ...

Violet and her sisters with fright huddling around Evans in the darkness of a corner and he could actually hear the wild thumping of their pure little hearts, the little girls thinking it a wild typhoon coming. Evans stood near enough of the opening to survey the approach of the thunderstorm, and noticed from the action of the clouds that it was indeed one of those wild Calverinian thunderstorms that sweeps the country in May ...

The rain falling was now so thick that nothing over fifty hundred yards could be seen unless it was revealed by the increasing incessant flashes of lightning which was now proceeded by a constant cannonading of the heavens. It was growing fast. Suddenly there blashed a bluish flash of lightening burning the eyes of all [who] beheld it like pepper. And terrific indeed was the detonation of the thunder-crash whose concussion shook down a score of ruined buildings and made all the trees quiver. Then gradually the sky seemed afire with the lightening, the thunder began to roar like a salvoes of violent cannonading and with surprising rapidity followed the vast columns of water precipitated from the sky.³⁶

Given the extent of Darger's involvement, at least in fantasy, with powerful storms, it is of interest that after volume one very few wild events of this type trouble *The Realms*. Instead the Realms of the Unreal are ravaged by inexplicable explosions, fires, and floods which, while of mysterious origin, can be tentatively attributed to human intervention. Unlike storms which cannot be controlled or opposed, these other kinds of natural disasters can be fought against, their overwhelming impact resisted. Given the symbolic nature of Darger's portrayal of the Easter Sunday Typhoon of 1841, it is perhaps understandable that he avoided any necessity to repeat such an entirely passive, uncontrolled, and traumatic experience.

However, this is not to suggest that there is only one such storm in *The Realms*, for volume one opens with a veritable inundation of destructive typhoons: hurricanes, cyclones, and tornadoes. The Spirian Tearian Typhoon that wipes out Hanson's family is embedded in a sea of typhoons, and in a crushingly pedantic account of their origin and nature. For twenty-eight pages Darger lectures his reader on the climatic conditions characteristic of the territory of *The Realms* — the contrasting situations of tropical heat and freezing cold; the conflicting movement of air masses above the McWhirthian, Calverinian, and Angelinian Seas — while carefully and fancifully, describing the many types of typhoons (Peevish, Sirocannian, Salablanian, etc.) and their behavior. His historical accounts of all such storms occurring in the area, with precise dates and estimates of resulting damage and death, finally degenerate into long lists which make it apparent that the region embraced by the Unreal is constantly exposed to attack by violent storms of almost limitless fury. Immediately prior

to the onset of the great Glandco-Abbieannian war, in 1912, the area was overwhelmed by a huge succession of terrible typhoons. It is almost as if he is attempting to bury, or to obscure, the Easter Sunday Typhoon in a complicated morass of no less powerful natural events. The endless account of storm phenomena is all but unreadable, until suddenly, on page 29, it changes into the essay on Blengiglomenean serpents, with which we are already familiar. Imagination takes over as forces vaguely connected to nature are replaced, or embedded in, allegorical animal form. The sky-borne Blengins, with their mile-long tails, are organic depictions of storms, and of the destructive and chaotic forces they can unleash, as well as being tender and maternal representations of his mother in the sky who watches over and protects all good children. As we know, this essay too is characterized by a curiously academic, pseudo-scientific tone designed to mask the intensity of his feelings and of his needs.

With this transformation, storms of various kinds all but disappear from *The Realms*, though, not surprisingly, our first meeting with the Vivian sisters, on page 16, finds three of them, Daisy, Catherine, and Hettie, caught outdoors in a typhoon.³⁷ On the few occasions when Darger did return to descriptions of major storms in *The Realms*, there is an oddly stereotyped quality to his choice of words, as though he couldn't escape from the images associated with the Easter Sunday Typhoon of 1841. The concealed symbolic implications of that event seem to force him to repeat the same images over and over again, particularly the specter of the ink-dark sky and of approaching doom.

Another reason for the relative absence of violent storms in the later volumes of *The Realms* is the fact that Darger constantly made use of storm imagery for his descriptions of battle. War for Darger was commonly evoked by language belonging to violent natural events, primarily storms of the most intense kind, though he also makes use, less regularly, of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, avalanches, etc. Various forms of human anger, rage, and what he was later to call "tantrums," also find expression in the language of storms.

He is at his confusing best when he actually juxtaposes natural and human warfare, by setting a battle in the midst of a violent storm.

How long the tremendous uproar of the storm continued no one can say, but during it all Evans and the rest were soon witnesses of the distant battle once more, shells sending amid the storm of rain and thunder swirling cyclones of wreckage, earth fragments, bodies and so on, high into the air, columns after columns of assaulting Glandelinians still going to pieces amid the worse earsplitting roar of the battle which drowned out the noise of the severe thunderstorm. How long the tremendous uproar of the battle continued and the shrieks of the millions of injured left at the mercy of the wild storm it is hard to tell ...

The air was still thickly clouded with debris and smoke, the battle raged on with redoubled fury in all that sheeted torrents of pouring rain, and the yell of the Glandelinians became so fierce once more, that when it was added by the answering yell of the Angelinians, it seemed that hell and

all its damned began to possess the air once more and were venting their savage rage in the most horrible unearthly sounds even louder than the screaming of a million shrill whistles. Column after columns of the Glandelinians were rended to fragments so frequently now, that they became confused. The dust and clouds of smoke poured everywhere thicker than the rain the savage fury of the battle continued on steadily in a paroxysm of rage that increased with tenfold vehemence the storm of battle now raging at its greatest fury.³⁸

Darger's imaginative conception of the limitless violence of storms regularly carries him beyond mere naturalism, adding elements of the mysterious and the magical. Freak storms occasionally appear to function in his story as heavenly messengers intervening in the nick of time to rescue the Vivian girls and distributing divine justice to their enemies. This is particularly the case in the collage-drawing *At Norma Catherine. But wild thunderstorm with cyclone like wind saves them* (8.7). A wild storm whose onset must have been all but instantaneous has caught a group of Glandelinian soldiers in the act of interfering with the Vivian girls. The nature of their deadly activities is made clear by the pink and protruding tongues of the children, all of whom were evidently being strangled when the storm stepped in to rescue them. The chaos that results is a strange mixture of the horrific and the humorous.

Henry Darger

At Norma Catherine. But wild thunderstorm with cyclone like wind saves them. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. 19 1/8 x 47 3/4 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The pale and insubstantial, indeed oddly mobile, landscape which Darger has created here is intended to convey the transformative power of nature unleashed. Land and water, mountains and sky, have changed places; the grassy plain suddenly submerged has turned from green to gray-blue; the gray forms dominating the sky are both mountain and cloud, crossed by ribbons of forked white lightning. In this magnificent study in Glandelinian gray, color serves a purely poetic function: the electric greens of the flying trees, the pallid expanse of blue-gray water, the white bodies of the children and the washed-out blond of their hair, all illuminated by the flickering lightning which provides the only light. At right, the sky has turned as black as pitch, but at the irregular boundary where gray and black meet a bizarre animal head peers out over the edge, into chaos. The storm's power is felt in the trees which bend over at right angles or snap off, loosing their leaves in the gale-force wind. The air is full of wind-borne branches, while a moose head, once safely mounted on a wall, now tumbles nose over antlers across the ground. Darger delights in such irrational events created by the storm's unthinking violence. The chief source of humor, unleashing his own powers of playful invention, is the wind's ability to hurl the naked bodies of the little girls head over heels through space, freeing them from their adult tormenters, and delivering them to the more playful violence of the storm. The Glandelinians, football players transformed, lose their balance, and their grip on their small victims, and sail off into the air. A large soldier, his face modified by the artist to resemble a masklike skull, runs straight toward us in a panic. His raised hand still clutches the head of a little girl, in place of what was once a football. Another soldier has already met his fate,

and lies, arms outstretched, on the watery plain. A smaller figure, neatly foreshortened, is about to be put out of action by a flying tree trunk. Darger plays not only with the weirdly disoriented figures, but with space itself, with bizarre shifts of scale appearing to suggest that the storm's irrational force has temporarily disconnected both gravity and reality.

Winter and Snow

Living in Chicago, Darger would have had more than enough experience of winter, of extreme cold and snow. From boyhood on he took an interest in heavy snowfalls and record low temperatures. In *The History of My Life* he recalled a tremendous blizzard which occurred in January of 1906 when he was fourteen.³⁹ His written descriptions of leaden winter skies, of freezing weather, and of avalanches of falling snow, are thoroughly convincing, unlike his dramatic portrayals of typhoons in the tropics or at sea. Some countries in *The Realms*, Calverinia for example, despite the presence of palm trees, giant flowers, and a generally tropical climate, are curiously prone to ferocious winters and blizzards of frightening intensity. As we know, Blengins display a particular dislike of snow.

Part of the great war is fought in winter, with all the suffering that that entails for the troops. Darger knew what it was to suffer from cold, but the direct connection he establishes between winter cold and death is surprising and probably reflective of experience other than freezing weather.

Thousands of bodies which lay exposed in the snow-covered company streets and which were more than necessary to remove

somewhere less they be unintentionally stepped on, were carried to barracks to be used as morgues until five thousand frozen corpses lay in rows on each of the low and wide floors. Then a big problem in mortality such as no Abbieannian army ever faced before since the war began was presented. Blizzards raged out of all proportions and accompanied by a one hundred and fifty mile an hour gale which carried all before it, and hid everything under snow ...

Therefore the immediate disposition of so many of these dead bodies became most completely necessary to save the whole besieging army from axfread plague with the coming of summer. Then it was that general Lowe and Vittiean and Dillion and the others who by common impulse had come together to deal with the problem found general Henry Darger.⁴⁰

It is striking that it is General Darger who is called upon to deal with the problem of disposing of thousands of frozen bodies in the dead of winter. His description of the logistics involved in solving this vast problem is surprisingly realistic, an example of the extreme concreteness of his imagination, and his accumulation and manipulation of accurate detail.

This general took up this most grewsome task the most grewsome and cold one ever seen on a battle field. But he had to have a great number of helpers. It was hard to get soldiers to go out anywhere on account of the severe cold weather and windy days. Some however volunteered, others were pressed into the service at the point of the bayonet. Big bonfires, whiskey and brandy by the bucketful was carried to these men

and the bonfires made to keep them from suffering from the effects of the intense cold, and they were drenched with it, and warmed as much as possible by the big fires. The stimulant was kept at hand and applied continuously, but no one became intoxicated. And only in this way was it possible for the soldiers with the stoutest hearts and the strongest constitution and the toughest skin and in the heaviest clothing to work in such surroundings, and in such awful cold, and in facing such dreadful icy blasts of wind. Under the directions of general Darger these thousands of bodies already collected, and others brought from the center section of the devastated camps — those which were quickest found in the deep snow, were loaded on war barges, and taken far down the Norma Run River to where unfrozen water could be found, to be cast into the deep icy waters ...

Eight hundred thousand men are wielding pick and shovel despite the blizzard and thousands suffer from cold feet, and frost bitten hands feet and ears every hour, and have to be exchanged. Included in this number were several thousand non-combatants who had volunteered their services. Many of the Glandelinian prisoners are also put in force and compelled to help in the work at the point of the bayonet. Bodies are being unearthed from the deep snow constantly, and it is estimated that at least twelve thousand five hundred victims of the artillery duel still lie beneath the snow by the disabled guns.⁴¹

THE VIVIAN GIRLS and their friends are often caught in snowstorms or lost in blizzards, but it is the child slaves who suffer most from the cold. Sad victims of Glandelinian cruelty, they are often made to stand outdoors on the coldest nights. On occasion, child victims are tortured by being tied naked to trees in the forest and abandoned there to die. There is a clear link in Darger's thinking between the abandonment of children, the experience of emotional deprivation and intense loneliness that this would involve, and the sensation of cold.

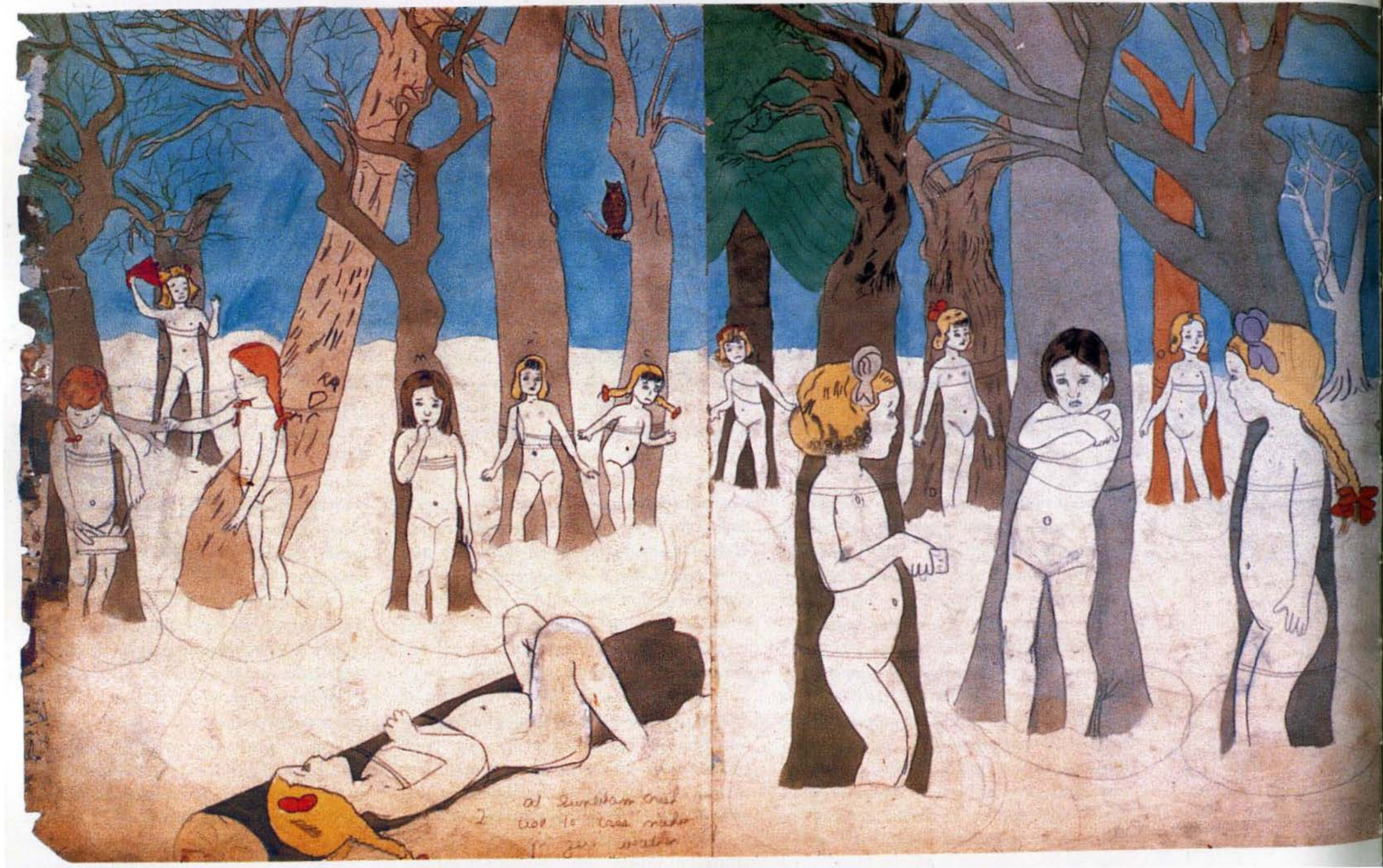
Paintings of winter scenes and of snow, though not common in the illustrations to *The Realms*, are not unknown. Perhaps the most beautiful of these is the collage-drawing *At Sunbeam Creak. Tied to trees naked in zero weather* (8.8). This is a calm and spacious scene set out of doors in the winter woods. All is clarity and light. The composition, with its large and simple figures, is carefully studied, the figural groupings startlingly original, the spacing nothing less than brilliant.⁴² To each of the trees, stepped back in space, a naked child is bound, their white bodies with boldly curving abdomen contrasted with the darker bark behind. The surrounding snow and the turquoise sky alternate with the organic forms of the trees and the living bodies of the children. The poses are not static, though the movement is slight. There is no sense of struggle.

The girl at the center of the subtle grouping at right is obviously cold and upset. Her fragile arms, crossed high on her chest, are oddly expressive of shivering and of trying to keep warm by hugging oneself.⁴³ Her facial expression, carefully drawn, is deeply sad, withdrawn, almost sullen. The little blonde girls to either side of her seem to attempt

to communicate with her, or at least to sympathize. Each child in the picture is a separate study, psychologically distinct; each responds differently to the situation of abandonment and to the cold. The eight blonde children are almost certainly intended as the Vivian sisters, probably accompanied by Angelina Aronburg.⁴⁴ They alone seem unperturbed. However, with the heroines of the story tied up, all would seem to be lost. One of the blonde children is tied to a log set diagonally in the snow. She lies on her back, her legs drawn up; lost in thought she seems almost to be dreaming. One feels the sky is growing darker and night is coming on. Only the small blonde child in the far background who waves a red cloth in the chill air holds out a last hope of rescue.

Another magnificent version of the theme of naked children in the snow exists, in which the Vivian girls, now on horseback, come to the rescue (8.9). But, as we shall see, some of the most violent massacres of children occur outdoors in the snow and with no hope of rescue. In these terrible snow scenes death is everywhere present, and the frozen white ground is drenched in blood (see illustration 11.21).

Snow was a serious topic for Darger. I know of no painting or text in which the children play in the snow. Oddly, there are no pictures which depict snow falling, whereas rain is often represented. Darger never depicted a blizzard in a drawing, though he describes them with extraordinary realism and feeling in his written text, delighting in juxtaposing nature's wildness and the chaos of war, with armies battling in the falling snow.



8.8 left
Henry Darger
*At Sunbeam Creek.
 Tied to Trees Naked in
 Zero Weather. Collage-
 drawing. 24 x 37 1/2 in.
 ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.*

8.9 right

Henry Darger

Untitled [Snow scene
with rescue of naked
child slaves by the
Vivian girls on horse-
back]. 19 x 46 in.

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The Chesterbrown Tornado

Darger was eighteen when he began the writing of *The Realms* in 1910, with the account of the Easter Sunday Typhoon. More than half a century later, in 1968, toward the end of his life, he returned to the description of a great storm, the Chesterbrown Tornado, in what was to be his final work, *The History of My Life*.⁴⁵ At first, this description of a storm, set in central Illinois in the spring of 1906, promises a degree of autobiographical objectivity. We soon realize, however, that Darger's attempt to describe his life was swamped, indeed utterly consumed, by this obsessional account of a natural disaster, a tornado whose final victim was, in a curious sense, himself. Examination of the almost 5,000 handwritten pages devoted to the description and analysis of the storm and its effects makes it immediately apparent that wildly irrational and subjective forces were at work undermining whatever objective or naturalistic intentions Darger may have had. As the true character of this storm, later to be called "Sweetie Pie," emerges, the symbolic connection, glimpsed earlier, between the experience of a cyclone and the traumatic feelings engendered by his mother's death after giving birth, is established in ever greater pathological detail.

Even Darger appears to have grasped the fact that an autobiography largely devoted to the endless description of a tornado was, to say the least, odd.

These no doubt were very singular fancies to occupy a man's mind in such unusual extremity, and I have often thought since that the sight of the revolutions of the immense shroud around the funnel of death, might have rendered me somewhat light-headed.⁴⁶

It is unlikely that Henry glimpsed the unconscious connections linking his childhood and the storm, which made this bizarre and sudden shift from autobiography to pure obsession understandable, if not reasonable. Nevertheless, at a certain point, after the book was finished, he seems to have realized that he had somehow moved beyond autobiography and off into the Realms of the Unreal once again, and so he began to refer to the book as a "fictional" work called "Sweetie Pie."⁴⁷

The style of this late work differs fundamentally from that of *The Realms*. Although it may be said to possess a beginning, it has no real end, and no true narrative progression is maintained.⁴⁸ The only character who appears throughout the work is Darger himself, with his obsession with the storm providing the book's fundamental content and reason for existing. Darger arrived unconsciously at an unusual style perfectly suited to the description of a tornado, a mode of compulsive writing which might be described as "turning in a gyre."⁴⁹ Returning day by day to the endless, detailed description of the storm's nature and destructive impact (all but unaware of what he had written previously), he seems to circle, coming back again and again to the same events, the same images, the same questions and concerns, as though, caught

in the tornado's rotating funnel, he is spiraling wildly out of control. Assuming greater prominence in the work, Darger appears to struggle with the storm, or at least with its meaning. One senses that the compulsive involvement with writing had become, at the same time, a desperate attempt to fend off death.

Darger's portrayal of the Chesterbrown Tornado involves an odd mixture of fact and fiction, with enough of the former to imply that some part of his description may again derive from actual experience. By locating the storm in central Illinois in the spring of 1906, he was enabled to be present at it as a witness.⁵⁰ But, though his observation of the storm's initial impact may contain certain elements of personal experience, the event begins almost at once to take on mythical characteristics, growing in size and significance as Darger's excitement mounts. Its destructive force is felt most violently in the nearby town of Chesterbrown (which does not exist), and soon extends over a wide area embracing seven major cities (including La Salle, Illinois, which indubitably does). Darger's epic imagination has taken over.⁵¹

There has never been witnessed in the experience of human beings so awful a scene of destruction as this tornado fury at these seven cities. The account of the cataclysm in which so many were killed or injured and rendered homeless with the total loss of all their household goods will make the proudest of all men feel how small and helpless and insignificant he is and indeed all the rest of humanity too in the face of nature's mighty and mysterious throes.⁵²

As with all of Darger's descriptions of natural cataclysms, this storm increases in magnitude and mystery as he writes. Since he can't be everywhere at once, he depends on interviews with survivors to convey something of its increasingly destructive effect. The use of eyewitness accounts also allows him a means of returning again and again, compulsively, to the same events: the storm's impressive approach, its onset and explosive violence, and, finally, the resulting devastation. It is this devastation, what we might call "the world after the storm," that is his real subject: the endless itemization, in crushing detail, of all that has been destroyed; the precise description of what happened to each individual or family; the number of deaths and the manner in which each occurred. There is an unmistakable similarity between Darger's obsessional involvement with the vast territory destroyed by the tornado and schizophrenic descriptions of a new reality following upon the end of the world, so that the more circumscribed nature of Darger's vision accurately delineates the extent of his personal psychopathology.⁵³

Curiously, certain buildings (religious institutions) become the focus of inordinate attention, in particular the Sacred Heart Convent and the Angel Guardian Orphanage, in Chesterbrown, and the Gleason Asylum. So fond is Darger of these buildings filled with children that the same institutions show up in each city so that he can participate in their destruction over and over again.⁵⁴ More surprising is the destruction of the Wicker Castle, a structure previously known only from its appearance in *The Lost Princess of Oz*.⁵⁵

While Chicago, "96 miles northeast of Chesterbrown," is not affected by the tornado, various streets and buildings in Darger's immediate neighborhood are placed in harm's way, and neatly decimated.

A moment more and the shrieking fury reached Halsted Street and Webster Avenue and in an instant the territory was one mass of flying debris everywhere and as high as the eye could see ...

To stand in what was a street like Webster avenue, formerly lined with beautiful buildings, a great St. Vincent's church and university and attractive shops and gay with color, and see it now with mere skeletons of the biggest houses on either side ... All of the magnificent St. Vincent's church the pride of Chesterbrown is almost all gone, and little or nothing remains of Lincoln Park and all it possessed.⁵⁶

The extreme nature of Darger's compulsive preoccupation with detail may be glimpsed in his description of the fate of his own church, now relocated to Chesterbrown.

The sacred edifice was thronged with pious crowds and the ceremonies were in full progress when the assembled throngs were certainly and suddenly startled from their devotions. From outside came fearful sounds like crowds of dogs howling ...

Down came the ponderous arches, the magnificent stately columns, the massive walls, no they flew crashing outwards. The lofty spires crashed down tumbling upon the heads of priests, altar boys, and people. The sacred images, the lighted wafers and candles, and they who knelt in adoration before them, the worshipped and the wor-

shippers alike, were in a moment buried under one undistinguishable mass of horrible ruins.⁵⁷

That the church is thronged with worshippers can be explained by the odd fact that a change of dates has occurred, unnoticed, in the course of the book. As an aspect of the changing extent and character of the storm its date was shifted to August 15, 1913, which Darger correctly identifies as the Feast of the Assumption.

The wholesale destruction of religious institutions, churches, convents, and orphanages, along with the clergy and children who occupy them, introduces serious moral issues, crucial questions which troubled Darger about the nature and meaning of this violent storm. "Why did the Good God allow the most greatest tornado catastrophe, the most destructive the world has ever seen?"⁵⁸ Questions concerning the nature of this supposedly natural event are necessitated by the slow emergence of a sense of mystery connected with this tornado. As the storm takes on an increasingly anthropomorphic character and form, Darger becomes deeply perplexed by questions concerning its cause, its unusual behavior and intensity, as well as its murderous destructive rage. Slowly, it becomes apparent that this storm somehow partakes of the supernatural, differing from all other storms in its vindictiveness, and specifically in its treatment of children.

Darger, occasionally in the guise of Hendro Dargar, scientist, authority on volcanology, fighter of forest fires, and expert on climatic conditions and storms, appears regularly to present a wide range of pseudo-scientific theories explaining the mystery.

He plays a far more central role in *The History of My Life*, freely using the pronoun "I," as one would expect in an autobiography. He elaborates complex theories having to do with the collision of several hurricanes, the tendency of the storm to follow railroad tracks or river banks, or to be influenced by inexplicable electrical phenomena, etc., but instead of diminishing, the mystery grows.⁵⁹ Finally, a trial is held, accusing the tornado of clearly unnatural acts. Darger appears in the role of prosecutor arguing strongly for conviction.

The Trial of the Mystery

"I would sum up with a very strong bias against the tornado. The evidence for the Character of the tornado is of course of great importance and can be readily relied upon completely. The tornado appeared undoubtedly to be what it is accused of ...

"Are you agreed gentlemen as to the decision you find in this case?" I asked.

"We are, Mr. Darger," the foreman replied.

"That the tornado is guilty of having more than twelve tornadoes as one?"

"Yes, Mr. Darger."

"The verdict of guilty against the tornado does not enable us to convict the tornado, and it does not solve the mystery. It cannot never be solved."⁶⁰

"Sweetie Pie"

Perhaps the most surprising, and yet ultimately predictable change in the nature of Darger's fictional tornado is its increasing approximation, in physical form, to the image of a little girl being strangled.⁶¹ In the utter irrationality of this morphological evolution, from the "shroud," to a threatening child in the clouds, to "the tongue," we come closest to the symbolic and emotional implications of this monster storm within Darger's psyche.

"Look at the crazy shape of the cloud turned sideways."

"I went to the window and saw a vast cloud shaped like a little girl's head turned sideways," she described. "The tongue was sticking half way out and the head was inclined slightly downward. Hand-shaped clouds were attached to the neck as if strangling the child ... The neck seemed to squeeze in, the tongue protruded more out, and suddenly from the inward part of the tongue; came a shaft of twisted snake-shaped lightening that made the oncoming blackness blinding bright ... Where the tongue protruded there was a sort of coughing and half choking sound ... at the same moment I perceived that the strange almost human naked shaped body of the child-formed cloud was rapidly changing into an odd churning current which set to the eastward its arms appearing to stretch downward with hands wide open. Even while I gazed the face seemed awfully contorted, that strange current acquired a monstrous velocity ..."

"Look at what was the protruding tongue," I shrieked. The tongue was gone. In its place was a howling funnel cloud shrouded half way up, a whirling umbrella shape upside down formed around it.⁶²

We will return again and again, just as Darger does, to the contemplation of this horrifying image in the sky (see illustrations 9.4, 11.5). In various forms the image of a female child being strangled had pursued him throughout his life, occupying his imagination, his fantasies, his desires, and his art. In its final and most terrifying form, as the tornado "Sweetie Pie," it reveals itself most fully, and it is in this spectral form that its destructive, indeed murderous, potential becomes most apparent.⁶³

It also becomes evident that the natural force embodied in it was to be found not in nature but within Darger himself. For the present, however, our examination of the tornado in its final manifestation as "Sweetie Pie," will be restricted to an examination of its outer form, and to its activities as an unusually dangerous and vindictive tornado. In chapter 9, we will consider its deeper, more symbolic, implications, and the part it played in Darger's internal world. Darger himself was puzzled by its "crazy shape."

A meeting will be held here in a few days to discuss the matter and if possible find out what caused the tornado cloud to assume such an unusual uncanny shape. I've heard when tornado clouds take on very odd crazy shape their fury is incomprehensible and of the most dangerous kind. They simply run wild and crazier than their formation.⁶⁴

The Tongue

At an early stage in its anthropomorphic evolution, the twister is given the name "the Tongue." "'How come that darn tornado is called the tongue.' someone at the meeting asked. 'It seems strange and ridiculous that word tongue.'"⁶⁵ Henry's terminology, perfectly reasonable, is based on the fact that in the process of being strangled, the cloud-child's tongue is forced further and further from her mouth, until, reaching the ground, it becomes the whirling funnel of the tornado. Such protruding tongues are, of course, found throughout Darger's pictorial illustrations of *The Realms*, invariably as a direct result of strangulation. Only now, however, with the tongue vastly enlarged and projected onto the sky as the funnel of the tornado, do we begin to grasp its wild destructive potential. Darger struggles to understand its nature and meaning, offering to draw it to obtain some insight.

... surely there are ways in which the mystery of the strangling child's head shape may be solved ...

So if only we had a picture or camera shot of it we could take a look at it and study it. If we had such a photograph or even a sketch we may discover an idea that will guide us to victory. Anyone here heard of anyone who ever took a picture of it?

Evidently no one took a picture of that odd shaped cloud. But if it would help I can sketch it perfectly according by following its description. I am also a perfect artist.⁶⁶

What exactly Darger seeks to discover by drawing the storm is unclear, perhaps even to him. But in his written descriptions another strange and significant feature of the cloud-child's body is emphasized, its enormously swollen abdomen.

I forgot to mention that the child form of cloud was absolutely perfect but kind of pot bellied. This abdomen was shaking and squirming back and forth as if a great pain was being suffered there. The form was nude.⁶⁷

The explosive potential of this swollen belly quickly becomes apparent, as does its connection with pregnancy and death.

As we begin to investigate the head and body of this vision of a cloud-child in the sky, it requires considerable presence of mind to hold to the fact that we are still discussing a tornado. This is because Darger's terminology becomes increasingly anatomical. His description of the storm is now largely anthropomorphic both in its shape and function. In the bizarre and complex evolution of this strange vision, one senses that he is using writing not so much to explain the phenomenon, as to understand it himself. Perhaps the strangest effort in this direction takes place in his room one night.

Far into the night I sat in my room studying the phologel head in search of a way to solve the strange mystery. I also made experiments hoping to discover something that would aid me. The only thing I could discover is by studying a skull I had in my room.

I examined the back of the skull, yet near midnight found me still unsuccessful. I took a narrow rubber tube and succeeded in pushing it through an opening in the back, and made it go out of the mouth part way like a protruding tongue. The rubber was a very soft type and so I blew into the tube to see if I could make it swell up. It did just like a balloon. I believed I had solved the mystery. The head was the swelled section of the funnel; the lower part forming the tongue.⁶⁸

It does not take an anatomist to realize that the strange manipulation of the soft and flexible tube which Darger could make "swell up" has to do with a mystery associated with the penis rather than the tongue.⁶⁹ This surprising discovery is confirmed by the final transformation of the tongue which, as it attains its full destructive potential, is withdrawn from the mouth. Passing through the chest, it bursts with explosive force though the abdominal wall. Only then does it turn downwards to unleash its violence on the earth below. "Witnesses claim when the cloud belly bursted the funnel came down from it. It is said the funnel pierced the chest formation from the mouth and exploded itself out of the belly."⁷⁰

Although Darger is far from clear about these amazing events, it is evident that a strange anatomical transformation has taken place, with the protruding tongue of the strangled child changed, with extreme suddenness, into the phallus of the little girl in the sky. It is this huge fantasy phallus, along with the exploding belly, which is then turned with murderous rage on mankind.

Professor Hale claimed he also witnessed the forming of the awful twister. He said the focus of annihilation and wholesale thousands of injured was the bursting belly part of the fresh strangulation child cloud. The tongue penetrating into the chest blew its way out through the belly and wiped out western Johnson Town and also Gleason and the asylum. Even the destruction of all of Chesterbrown and its most important building was due to the belly buster.⁷¹

The Murderous Massacre of Little Children

As the unconventional anatomy of the tornado emerges from cloudy obscurity, it comes as no surprise to discover that young children become the primary object of its violence. What is unexpected, however, is the occasionally sexual nature of its assault. As will become apparent, the storm in its rage closely approximates the monstrous behavior of the Glandelinians in their sadistic attacks on children, primarily little girls. Not only the rage of the tornado, but its libidinal drives, parallel Darger's own. The massacres which result inevitably include all of the sadistic and murderous forms of assault on the body which we encounter in the activities of evil adults in *The Realms*, and in Darger's earlier fantasies. What is striking is that these sexual and aggressive fantasies were still active at the end of his life, irrationally modifying even the behavior of storms. Occasionally, he experienced his own rage, what he referred to regularly as "tantrums," through analogy with storms. "Had trouble again with twine. Mad enough to wish I was a bad tornado. Swore at God."⁷² That bad tornadoes such as Sweetie Pie are capable of undressing, strangling, and even disemboweling little girls should therefore come as no surprise.

There were children, both girls and boys with amputated hand, feet or parts of arms. Broken bones busted noses. An eye or so gouged out teeth knocked out, bad bleeding cuts and stabs. Also stuck with pieces of timber in arms, legs, chests, or abdomen and shoulders. Also badly blackened eyes, one or both lacerated cheeks or chin. Everything you can think of.

One strange thing. Three children two boys and a girl stripped totally naked and hog tied by ropes ...

Even children were found, each with their legs locked together to one another. It took twenty hours to get them loose. A boy and girl also were found where her hair had been wound (braids) around his neck so tightly that he was strangled to death.⁷³

Sweetie Pie's revenge involves attacking children in the same manner in which she has been attacked.

All the dead mostly children blown from the supermarket were stark naked, their clothing apparently having been torn away from their bodies like so much tissue paper. In the vast majority the way they must have been flung every which way seems to have been the sole cause of death. Great numbers of the bodies have been burst asunder by the force of the terrific wind and lie disemboweled ... There were many of the little victims who died with their bellies torn open.⁷⁴

Clearly, this is no normal storm, and that is precisely what Darger as prosecutor concludes:

And now my fellow members this storm is to stand forth in the eyes of the world as a bloodstained wind monster, the devastating wind enemy not of cities and towns only, but of humanity and old mother nature in general ... This storm has done what no other tornado has ventured to do.⁷⁵

In a marvelous passage Darger envisions a conversation between Mother Nature and her irresponsible daughter, Sweetie Pie. In that he was unable to grasp Mother Nature's connection with

God the Father, or the manner in which they share responsibility for the weather, his references to her are usually ambivalent. No references to mother are insignificant in Darger. One suspects that this curious discussion, which might almost be a conversation taking place between his lost mother and her daughter, the sister he never knew, could only have been written at the end of his life.

Says old mother nature, "Why Sweetie Pie, how could you do this?"

"I couldn't help it. I got caught between the storms and they caused my downward current to be too strong."

"I'm jealous of you, only my earthquakes can best what you did."

"I could not help it and don't care. Be jealous if you wish."

"You spoiled your good name. See what you did."

"I couldn't help it if they were in my path. I can't control myself, and could not change my course. That darn river, rails, and earthroad held me on a beeline course."

"Sweetie Pie, what made you take on the shape of a strangling child?"

"That I couldn't help either. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, go on, it was the craziest thing you did."

"I'm not responsible. That was because I got caught between the storms. Couldn't help even myself. See you again, mother."

"Bye, Sweetie Pie. But hold your temper next time."

"I'll try, mother, bye now."⁷⁶

Earth

And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great ... And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

—Revelation⁷⁷

The Last Judgement is not Fable or Allegory, but Vision ... The Last Judgement is one of these Stupendous Visions. I have represented it as I saw it; to different people it appears differently as everything else does; for tho' on Earth things seem Permanent, they are less permanent than a Shadow, as we all know too well ...

—William Blake⁷⁸

Underlying Darger's history of a world at war is a more disturbing vision, of the earth itself grown unstable, and of the laws of man, of God, and even of nature, ceasing to hold. Darger is drawn to cataclysm; at the heart of his dark imaginings is a planet destroyed, a nascent vision of the end of the world.⁷⁹ Although the narrative surface of his story attempts to maintain and defend some aspects of reality, of natural order and Christian morality, he is constantly slipping unawares over the edge into chaos. Ultimately, *The Realms*, and indeed all his writings, are dominated by portrayals of nature run amok, of the earth in upheaval.

It may be in the nature of men of genius to dispense with easy assumptions of stability and regularity in the universe, indulging, at least on occasion, in imaginative speculations concerning natural

forces become destructive; nature turning against itself, creating terrible images of the world destroyed by fire or flood, collapsing in upon itself, or exploding outward. For the Western world, the ultimate expression of such apocalyptic events are found in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. More personal, and perhaps pathological, visions of this kind are represented among the creations of Ovid, Leonardo da Vinci, Dürer, William Blake, and many others.⁸⁰ Images of this kind are also occasionally present in schizophrenic ideation, as unconscious but overwhelmingly powerful analogies of the mind disintegrating or in final collapse. Darger's vision draws both on pathology and on revelation.

PERHAPS the ultimate human experience of anxiety is that awakened when the solid earth beneath our feet begins, irrationally, to move. The Vivian girls and other children in *The Realms*, though remarkably resilient, live in a fearful world constantly torn by massive earthquakes, mysterious explosions, huge eruptions of earth and stone, and terrifying bursts of sound and air. Darger revels in depicting a realm in endless upheaval, shaped and reshaped by cataclysmic processes. In *The Realms* land masses sink and mountains rise, the land and seas change place, lakes are formed and as suddenly drained, and rivers change course and flood across the plains. Violent explosions hurl the surface of the brittle earth into the air, or carve giant fissures across its face, rocks fall like rain, strange displays of light, electricity, or magnetism trouble the planet, and life is wiped out with irrational suddenness and force. Everywhere huge craters mar the tormented landscape, and abandoned cities lie in ruins. It is in these visions, extending over hundreds of pages, of a

strangely insubstantial and fluid earth, that we encounter Darger's untamed and irrational genius in full flight. The spectacle is dazzling, with not only nature, but the intellect, unleashed.

"THE FRIGHTFUL EXPLOSION"

"How strange," the little girls mused to themselves, "is this unaccountable fear that is within us. Must we alone be seized and tormented by such unjustifiable apprehension?"

As they took the nerve to go inside the house again, Violet looked at the clock. Eight o'clock had passed.

"Go outside. Go outside," calls a warning voice seemingly within the air and almost resembling that of little Annie Aronburg. And a third time the same interior prompting urges the little girls to leave the building. The terrible crash of the battle still resounded throughout the coming night, mingling with the boisterous song of thousands of cannons, and the thunders of terrific explosions. Far to the west the sky was all aflame as if there was some great fire, but Violet and her sisters had no time to think of this.

Scarcely had Violet and her sisters left the threshold again, when they observed something in the south like a sudden outburst of a volcano, there came a tremendous crashing as if millions of parks of artillery exploded simultaneously. Indeed roaring and with furious speed the rolling wave came on bringing swift explosion. Then suddenly to the ears of the little girls came the stunning and tremendous deafening noise of falling houses, caving walls and

collapsing ceilings. Stones were hurled through the air, the end of the world seemed to come, and mingled with the din came cracking floors and crashing timbers everywhere, causing a dense cloud of suffocating dust to ascend to the bright starry sky. A moment only and the town of Goodnow was no more.

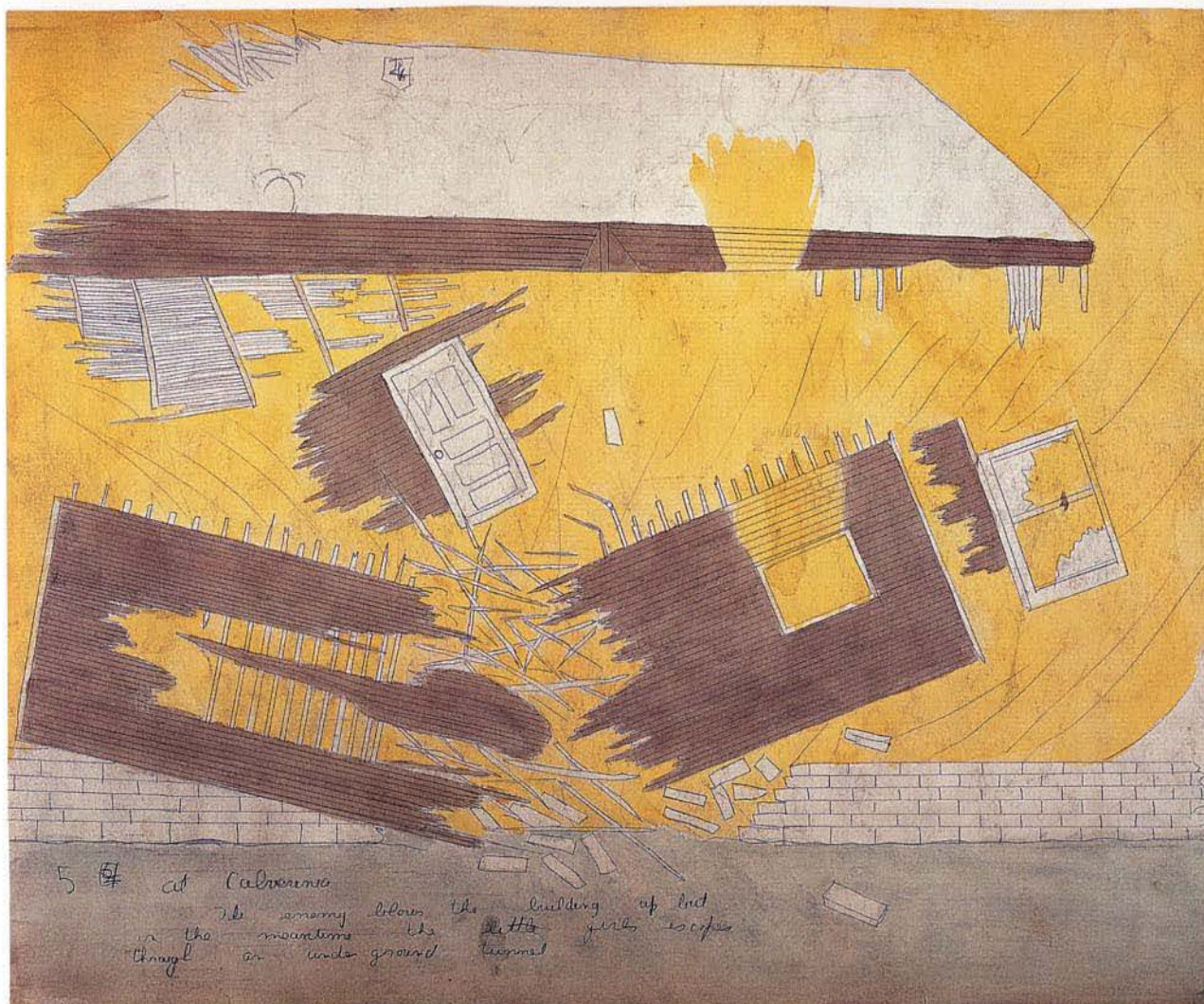
... What hours of suspense preceded the tragedy. The woeful cry of millions of wounded, the unheeded cry for help from those partly covered with debris, the death rattle of the dying, the piteous moaning and whining of crushed and mangled children all increased the horrors of this dreadful night. Jolted by repeated shocks of earthquake produced by more great explosions, the awful ruins pinned down their victims still more tightly as fresh masses of walls and earth caved in. As long as the battle would be continuing there would be no escape, no means of rescue for the wounded from this confusion and desolation. The streets were blockaded by piles of debris with no possibility of passage.

After this experience it was clear to Violet and her sisters who it was that had given them no peace. Without the faithful warning of their guardian angels and of little Annie Aronburg, they thought to themselves, they would now lie dead or buried alive beneath the debris of the house they had taken refuge in for the night. Thanks to the interior promptings, they had apprehended the approaching dangers, and were able to secure their protection and safety in the beautiful garden at a

distance from buildings. In fervent prayer they gave thanks to their guardian angels and the little Aronburg Girl for this miraculous rescue.⁸¹

Some of the explosions and earth tremors which occur in *The Realms* have natural causes. For example, the concussion of thousands of cannons fired at once rocks the battlefields and surrounding areas for hours or days. These manmade explosions are caused by weapons of war and, though powerfully destructive, are perhaps comprehensible. But, even in the midst of battle, explosions occur which are unexplained, their immense force terrifying the Christian troops, and raising questions concerning the possibility that nature is somehow participating in the war on the side of the enemy.

During the retreat there occurred an explosion among the christian lines that was as gigantic as a titanic volcanic eruption. Sudden series of explosions lasting seventeen seconds hurled boulders and immense rocks 30 to 90 feet in diameter to the distance of more than a mile and wiped out a whole line of christian troops. In the vicinity of the explosion the thick clouds of smoke had turned day into darkness for forty eight minutes, and covered the region with a layer of mud and debris that varied in thickness from a few feet to sixteen feet. The narrow escape of all the surviving christians who witnessed this gigantic explosion paralyzed them with panic. The explosion had a preternatural violence and was more spectacular than any explosion ever witnessed during the war before.⁸²



8.10

Henry Darger

At Calverinia. The enemy blows the building up but in the meantime the little girls escape through an underground tunnel. Central panel of a double-sided triptych. Collage-drawing. Watercolor and pencil on paper. 19 x 70 in. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. On loan from the Musgrave Kinley Collection of Outsider Art. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The Glandelinians reveal a disturbing familiarity with explosives. Capable of planting mines beneath anything, they are constantly surprising their foes by sending buildings sailing into the air. For example, in the picture *At Calverinia. The enemy blows the building up but in the meantime the little girls escape through an underground tunnel*, Darger takes obvious delight in depicting the explosion of a bomb placed beneath a wooden house, with fragments of once solid architecture splintered, and taking flight (8.10). Caught up in the excitement of the moment, he eliminates all figures, instead placing himself, mentally, at the center of the blast which blows this structure apart. The resulting composition embodies his obsessional concern with scientific accuracy and detail. Against a background of yellow flames he envisions the tremendous force which sends the roof straight up, while driving the blocks of the foundation forward toward us. Radiating from the center, the explosion breaks the facing wall asunder at its mid-point, lifting the outer corners, and revealing the internal skeleton of two-by-fours. Windows and doors remain more or less intact though their glass panes are shattered. In short, he participates imaginatively in the explosion, following the outward burst of energy and experiencing its impact on various parts of the structure. In the process, the Vivian girls are forgotten, disposed of through a convenient, but invisible, tunnel.

Enemy munitions include huge shells which burst in the air or crash into houses, blowing them to pieces. The collage-drawing *At Norma Catherine*. *The dream they had, which in the following picture came true. The shell hit the wall of their prison,* depicts such an event, reminding us of the strange ability of the Vivian girls to dodge incoming shells, and even to profit from violent explosions in their vicinity (8.11). To depict these airborne explosions he relied on the stereotypical drawings of bursting bombs found in comic book illustrations. He collected and traced these radiating patterns, using them again and again in his collage-drawings. These small abstract diagrams of explosive force are perfect analogies of the contained energy of the Vivian sisters, who, despite the explosions which fill the sky, are still alive, and scooting through the landscape below.

Other children are less fortunate. Threatened with defeat, the Glandelinians calmly use dynamite to blow up thousands of child slaves. The resulting carnage is a nightmare calculated to appeal uniquely to Darger, with explosives carefully placed to eviscerate the children's bodies.

Dead bloody torn open bodies of children pelted the combatants as thick as rain followed by a tremendous cloudburst of planks, logs, and utensils of every description, besides scores of broken guns and muskets by the millions fell everywhere in broken fragments. Even the intestines fell like rain and soon everything was a scene of the most indescribable horror, a panic seizing the Angelinian columns and they broke back and fled in confusion back toward the woods despite all the attempts of the officers to rally them.⁸³



8.11

Henry Darger

At Norma Catherine.

The dream they had,

which in the following

picture came true.

The shell hit the wall

of their prison. Central

panel of a three-

panel composition.

22 x 79 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.

Darger's real concern, however, is with unexplained explosions seemingly occasioned by nature, vast eruptions of the earth's surface which rock *The Realms* from end to end, setting off vast earthquakes and tidal waves and modifying the topography of whole regions of the Unreal. Such explosions seemed to stem from volcanic activity and the build-up of forces beneath the earth.

Lacking personal experience of volcanoes in eruption, he searched in books for descriptions of their nature and cause. One of the books in his library, a serious study by John C. Soley, entitled *Sources of Volcanic Energy*, provided him with excellent photographs and descriptions of natural volcanic phenomena. This book is also the source of his many references to historical volcanoes such as Etna or Vesuvius (AD 79), Krakatoa (1883), or Pelée, on the island of Martinique (1902).⁸⁴ Since this last eruption occurred during his boyhood, he may have felt a special affinity to it, which may explain the fact that he owned the July 1902 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, which was devoted to volcanoes.⁸⁵ He would also have been well informed about the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which occurred while he was still living at the Lincoln Asylum. We have already encountered his surprising reference to the psychologist William James (1842–1910) who “made interesting notes ... at the great San Francisco earthquake calamity.”⁸⁶

Darger had a considerable acquaintance with scientific theory having a bearing on natural forces, and an at least imaginative grasp of geographic topology. In all of his writings about natural phenomena there is an element of showing off his knowledge. However, as a creative writer he was impatient with mere facts. As a result, his vision of natural cataclysm moved rapidly out beyond the possible. In his quest for truly epic imagery he enlarges upon the natural, in search of mystery. Nature's participation in *The Realms* is, therefore, carried out on a truly grand scale, and is always puzzlingly mysterious. His aim is not so much truth as beauty.

On the early morning of the first the smoke clouds making it almost as dark as midnight hung low and were piling up from the north and west in mountains of swiftly rising rolls and took on their lowest extremities flickering reddish hues sometimes sunset bright and other times dull. There was no sound of an explosion up to that time. Suddenly the sky darkened still more and somewhere in the northwest the sky then reddened like the glaring of a very red bright sunset when the sky is perfectly clear.⁸⁷

Distant explosions had the advantage of allowing Henry to focus on the sky and on changes occurring with extreme suddenness in the upper atmosphere. They also provide for a time-lag, before the sound and fury descend on his child heroines. Ultimately his goal is never merely naturalistic.

“What the —” Her voice was drowned in a fearful thundering uproar that immediately ensued.

... Almost immediately they were pelted with sand, broken fragments of trees, and small stones, which as the exploded mass shot down all over the territory causing Violet and her sisters to take shelter in the bigger woods near by, and even there smaller objects rained down among the trees making noise like rain and hail ... For a moment it seemed to Violet and her sisters as if without warning the very bowels of the earth were hurled into the air by this series of most tremendous explosions they had ever witnessed.⁸⁸

Darger's pictorial representations of these mysterious explosions, and of the plight of the children in situations of overwhelming natural disorder, are usually rather tame when compared with his written accounts of the earth in chaos. An unusually fine exception is the collage-drawing *At Torrington. Imperiled by terrific explosions* (8.12). This is one of the rare pictures in which he tries to show the landscape being physically altered by enormous explosions mysteriously erupting out of the earth itself. A small tree-covered mountain is literally thrust into the air, with huge fragments of earth, trees, and boulders breaking loose and turned into projectiles. In an astonishing imaginative detail he depicts the roots of the trees extending downward from underneath the sailing mountain, and planted now only in clouds. Caught in the midst of a fragmenting world, with the peaceful landscape disintegrating around them, the Vivian girls, in leisure suits, are indeed “imperiled.”



8.12

Henry Darger

At Torrington.

Imperiled by terrific

explosions. Right

panel of a four-panel

composition.

Collage-drawing.

19 x 95 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.

Not only is Darger obsessed with the increasing size and impact of these explosions, he also dwells on the increasing frequency with which they occur. It becomes apparent that the land itself is imperiled, erupting randomly without apparent reason, with cities and towns as vulnerable as open planes. The Christians are forced to adapt not only to war, but to Nature turned violent and unpredictable. He seeks to depict a situation of increasing instability, in which even the most basic elements of human security, including the earth itself, are undermined.

Precisely because of their internal (psychological) verity, Darger is concerned to remind us of the unreality of these events. Perhaps it is his awareness of their murderous impact which leads him to deny that they could ever have occurred. As explosions multiply and casualties mount, he tells us once again that he is writing fiction, not history: "probably in reality never such a disaster will ever occur or will or could ever come to pass."⁸⁹

Confusion: Fantasy and Fact

Paradoxically, in a fictional work dealing with natural disasters which have never happened, the author manifests a compulsive concern with the assignment of responsibility and of guilt. The question of blame becomes a central issue, and is discussed endlessly throughout *The Realms*. Through fifteen volumes, Darger attempts to maintain a sense of uncertainty, indeed of mystery, concerning these natural events. Fundamentally, the mystery centers on the cause of the explosions, since the subsequent earthquakes, floods, and fires are understood to follow, for the most part, on explosive eruptions originating beneath the earth. He is not entirely

successful in his attempt to mystify the reader in that from the very beginning he considers the possibility that the Glandelinians are somehow tampering with nature. The exact means by which they achieve their "unnatural" ends is, however, successfully concealed until the later volumes (volume ten, part one).

The chief source of confusion results from the fact that all of the cataclysmic events described are, with the possible exception of the explosions, natural. Forest fires, floods, earthquakes, landslides, tidal waves, while unexpected, are understandable as manifestations of nature out of control. Even the explosions, while unusual, are associated with volcanic eruptions occurring with unnatural frequency on the level plains. Accordingly, two culprits are considered over and over again as potentially responsible for the disasters plaguing *The Realms*: nature herself, or, functioning out of sight, behind nature as it were, God. The participation of God in *The Realms* is one of its central issues. But, as we have seen, nature too is personified and, to some extent, held responsible for the chaos unleashed on the Christian nations. Ultimately, the Christians hold the Glandelinians responsible somehow for nature's participation in the war, and in the unnatural turmoil affecting the land.

This is made evident in Gertrude Angeline's great meditation (in volume six), on the causes of the disaster affecting *The Realms*.

Since early last June, nay even during July elsewhere following, came the continual shock of new disasters, distant explosions with the force of volcanic eruptions, the destruction of many more cities and villages, the deaths in horrible torture

of many more thousands of hapless people, the tortures of conflagrations, famine, thirst, diseases, the heartrending grief of countless multitudes mourning their loved ones who were lost, the wails of many countless thousands crying for succor ...

How powerless indeed is our nation, as it seems, to save even after Nature assails through the suspected efforts of the enemy, how feeble our boasted strength and intellect against the stupendous natural forces, produced by the unknown strange works of the enemy, who create explosions which could rend mountains in twain, make the earth rock like the waves of the sea from the concussions, and cause floods which no one can comprehend, and Glandelinia call this war. If it is then what is civilized warfare?⁹⁰

— a cry which might well have continued to ring throughout the whole of the twentieth century.

One other possible guilty party is briefly considered as a potential source for all the trouble, Darger himself. As author, and as creator of the Glandelinian hordes, should he not be held responsible for all that occurs in his imaginary world? Once again, we are brought face to face with the origin of this work in the psyche of one man, and with the issue of his responsibility and guilt. It is of real interest that it is Darger himself who poses this question for us; and then, neatly, sidesteps the issue and all responsibility. Once again, it is the Glandelinians who are to blame, and their reality is not his.

No doubt many of the readers throughout the world might be asking themselves when they read of these "BEAUTIFUL" disasters, what manner of nation can Glandelinia be? Was she mad? Was she literally a hell overwhelming christiandom? Maybe I too would be blamed partly for it or criticized. Maybe the reader would say, "Maybe the writer himself is heartless." Or also, couldn't the author have selected a better or at least a more refined character for an opposing nation? This Glandelinia is bold, extremely dangerous, given to such wickedness as to commit horrors which happened, which I did not dare to write about here, but which far surpassed the disasters I have written, which in horror made these catastrophes seemed pleasant indeed. Glandelinia we all know is a foe of our Blessed Lord, rather forward in her disaster plans, and in carrying them out self willed ... But stay, Reader, let's get in a word. What the reader may think of Glandelinia is holy compared to what she really is. Keep her in the background, and don't worry about her ... Let us hope that in due time the Vivian Girls will find proofs of the Abbieann reign of terror, that Abbieannia will come out of the sorrow and horror glorious and a gem of the world, and that the ferocity of powerful Glandelinia may be subdued and thrown flat in the dust."

The meticulous way in which Darger went about maintaining and augmenting the sense of mystery step by step, dropping occasional hints, distracting the reader with misleading controversies, and finally unveiling the means by which the enemy's destructive ends are achieved, represents undeniable evidence of a conscious ego: exerting control, and skillfully manipulating the reader over the course of 15,000 pages, an unheard of achievement.

As we have often remarked, Darger's portrayal of unreality is unique in that he embeds the mysterious, the unexplained, the fantastic, in an avalanche of mundane fact. Having taken his stance in the Realms of the Unreal, he proceeds to overwhelm the reader with realistic detail. His other world, in ruins, torn and devastated by unrestrained destructive forces, is portrayed in endless, crushing, descriptive detail and sensory richness. Ultimately, he seems obsessed with demonstrating the reality of a world destroyed. This is particularly true of his vision of the shattered earth, the land and the experience, which he eventually calls "the Valley of the Shadow of Death."⁹² The enormous length of *The Realms* was necessitated finally, by his insistence on portraying the precise nature of cataclysm.

Using interviews with survivors and witnesses of cataclysm, he seeks through repetition to convince us of the reality of their unusual experiences, however unreal, however harrowing. This journalistic technique, and the use of descriptive modes derived from newspapers, adds veracity to the accounts of their personal experience of the end of the world. Through their stark words he conveys the subjective feelings associated with disaster: of loss, of death, of chaos.

The war correspondent wrote ... the barks were torn and burned away from the trees twenty miles away from the explosions by the force of the blast, and the fruits of the earth for more than a hundred miles from the scene were destroyed, the very ground was torn into huge craters, the tidal wave on the sea produced by the concussion, uprooted the very bottom and depths of the sea ten miles from shore, scores of towns along the shore and some fortifications were totally washed away, and one hundred and ninety eight great guns weighing ten to twenty tons each were swept into the depths of the sea. The barks of the trees were burned off and torn loose by the force of the blast and also by strange electrical action. Many cannons of various batteries were driven along the submerged fortifications or carried away into the depths of the sea and some hurled into the air by the terrible force of the waves. At Ermine Run a perfect deluge of debris hurled far and wide and high into the air by the explosions fell like a cloud burst of materials as if from some sudden devastating volcanic eruption upon several towns, and entirely destroyed them. There were fourty thousand houses in one of these towns with over ten thousand inhabitants, and the Governor of the State reported the fate of these towns to the Emperor in only four words: "The towns have disappeared."⁹³

At times, random detail becomes a source of humor as Darger knowingly goes too far, moving beyond the unreal into the absurd. He does this both in writing and in the drawings, describing a host of incidental events, playing with trivial detail, reveling in his ability to move from the macro-cosmic to the microscopic at will, and relieving the sense of unmitigated horror with a dose of the ridiculous.

A million dollars worth of dishes were also broken. Church steeples crashed down, clocks in countless numbers stopped, and hundreds of thousands of people were driven from home, offices, orphan asylums, and other buildings in great fright only to be slightly or more injured by torrents of glass that fell upon them from the windows of higher buildings.⁹⁴

DARGER DISPLAYS a sincere respect for experts, particularly university professors and writers of books on natural science which he had consulted. On occasion, their opinions are quoted in *The Realms*.⁹⁵ Some of the names appear to be fictitious (Dr. Kerney Caldwell,⁹⁶ Dr. Ottis Harvey of the Museum of Natural History in New York), but others are in fact turn-of-the-century authorities on geology whose works Darger must have used. The two most famous experts in the field were the English scholar John Milne (1850–1913), whose book *Earthquakes and Other Earth Movements*, was a major text on the phenomenology of earthquakes, and the American scientist Angelo Heilprin (1853–1907), of Philadelphia, an authority on volcanoes. Heilprin's book *The Earth and Its Story: A First Book of Geology*, may have been Darger's initial introduction to the field. It is clear that he was interested in the study of science, and

in the reality of violent natural forces let loose. On the other hand, he was not averse to confronting such authorities, in *The Realms of the Unreal*, with cataclysmic occurrences surpassing anything in their experience or training.

Foremost among the experts regularly consulted with reference to the bizarre upheavals disturbing the Christian territories is "Hendro Dargar, the eminent geologist and authority on forest fires, earthquakes, and volcanology."⁹⁷ Conferences are repeatedly organized in the hope of obtaining insight into the nature of the disasters threatening the Realms and mankind. Leading professors are invited to join with the Vivian girls and their little friends in putting forward theories concerning questions of cause and of moral responsibility. Again and again the possibility that the enemy is somehow responsible for the outbreak of explosions and earthquakes is considered and dismissed for lack of evidence. If, however, nature is to blame, a host of moral and religious questions are constellated, which are far more difficult for the children, given the innocence of their faith, to resolve.

Some speak of explosions as being caused by a million tons of explosions put in mine galleries by the enemy. Others state that the enemy blew up a munitions storehouse holding countless tons of high explosives at Clarendon City, which had been blown out of existence when the blast actually occurred, though it boasted of nearly a hundred thousand inhabitants. One other said the cause of the great explosion were a most profound mystery of which only the enemy knew.

A war correspondent says the disaster was the cause of some christian general's

blunder. Another said that, after careful examination of all the records, the explosion broke forth because of a forest fire then raging near Cedernine, and implies that the biggest fire the war had yet, was either set by the enemy or by the battle itself.⁹⁸

Since theory, in the absence of fact, can settle nothing, the decision is usually arrived at to organize a scientific expedition led by a suitable person, which will go to the source of the disaster, fire, flood, volcanic eruption, or unexplained explosion, to investigate. Given the nature of the task, this function is frequently conceived to lie less in the territory of natural science than in that of the detective; and who better qualified for such an investigation than the head of the Gemini, Hendro Dargar?

"... And who is going to do the investigating?"

"Why not suggest the work to Hendro Dargar, the great Gemini?" said Jane Nelfort.

"Professor Dargar has plenty to do besides that," declared Mary Stanck ...

"Whatever it is," said Catherine Estrabrook, "Dargar and many of his members have made a special study of the causes of these disasters. Dargar has made a trip to the Abbieann horror as far as it is possible to go for purposes of study to see whether the disasters were of volcanic origin or not. He too, you know, is an authority upon Volcanography."⁹⁹

The Scientific Expedition of Walter Starring

The sudden and complete annihilation of the great city of Abbieann and its surrounding regions, on June 1, 1913, represents the ultimate explosive event in the story, its lifeless ruins a haunting symbol of the tortured geology of the body in death and decomposition. Darger's description of this event is startlingly beautiful, biblical in its stark portrayal of the end.

It is one minute to one. Everyone is in bed asleep. Yet to everyone in the western and extreme southern part of Abbieann this is the last of earth.

The horizon sky lightens. Suddenly the ground shakes as if there was a terrific earthquake, while there came a roar as if the whole world was blown to pieces like a fire cracker. A smokey pall appears to rise, and a terrific flash appears, blotting the view of walls of flame that are hurled toward the city. A very devils tattoo is sounded by the Cathedrals. However these rapid notes are the pounding of stones that shower from the sky. The clouds of debris falling with the speed of hail spreading as a fan, its edge rolling and volleying like a breaker falls upon the city. In one breath the people are buried beneath the ruins. In another moment it seems as if the cloud turns to fire, with a roar like naval warfare.

Now great clouds of mud, earth, dust and the like, falls thick and fast upon the northern portion of the city. But human eyes do not see these things. They are glazed, and stare at vacancy, for at one

throb eight million human hearts have ceased to beat. Abbieann? There is no such place.¹⁰⁰

As is almost always the case with Darger's descriptions of disaster, the size of the explosion and the amount of territory destroyed increases as the narrative unfolds. His manic prose mimics the lines of force of the explosion as they radiate out across Calverinia and his text.

All records of all previous explosions even of volcanic explosions present and past on this whole earth were completely broken. So great was the force of the explosion, that nearly six hundred miles of country were split into millions of cracks and fissures by the concussion and a large part of the fields and plains in the vicinity of Abbieann were scattered to the four winds of heaven.¹⁰¹

The enormous impact of this explosion would almost seem to have been designed to allow Darger to go beyond his customary descriptions of the loss of lives and property damage, to contemplate the geological implications of this natural event on the surface and in the depths of the earth itself. Inevitably, the mystery increases as one approaches the earth's body and its dark cavities. Walter Starring, who leads the investigative expedition to the "death city," explains:

"What first got me guessing is that when the earliest part of the disaster was first known, and it was firmly believed to have been an eruption, that Calverinia's most famous volcano, Mt. Joan, had exploded and blown herself to pieces thus destroying Abbieann from the eruption

only. This was the highest and most famous mountain in all Calverinia ... Though now apparently extinct, it was about a hundred years ago an active volcano, and the history of Calverinia mentions several very disastrous eruptions ...

"Yet when such reports came that such an enormous volcano blew itself to pieces, many volcanic investigators were sent to find the facts, and came back somewhat later to surprise the whole country with all proofs and photographs chiefly made to show that the volcano was as quiet as it ever had been, and had not been in no eruption, and neither had its neighbors Mt. Calverine, Vivian, and others.¹⁰² The disaster therefore took on a real suspicious aspect, and the Vivian Girls asked me to investigate to find out some real facts ... It has been impossible for me to give an absolute statement as to the real character of the disaster, but that I will remain here and continue my effort if it takes all my life to do so."¹⁰³

In a very real sense, it did.¹⁰⁴

Starring appears to be an unusually determined young man, intrigued by nature in its wilder moods. He travels through Calverinia at great risk to himself studying all manner of disasters, though with a particular emphasis on the investigation of craters. Darger offers little insight into Walter's motivation, no explanation concerning his obsession with cataclysmic geological events. Is it possible that for both of them traumatic occurrences in childhood underlie their shared preoccupation with catastrophe? Certainly, Starring's explanation of his purposes reveals a remarkable intensity.

"Well," said Walter, "we have literally a plague of great floods, forest fires, explosions, and everything else. It is surely shocking, and it makes me more determined to find out who is really responsible. And I'm going to do it if I have to go through hell for the purpose."¹⁰⁵

The result is an entire volume devoted to his explorations in the ruins of Abbieann and its surroundings, his private descent into hell.¹⁰⁶

Everywhere he looked, desolation was absolute, he also almost fancied he was on a foreign planet that had been wiped out by a terrible lunar disaster, so fearful was the scene before him now ... He now realized the full extent of the disaster, and believed that in the world's history, or since mankind was created on the earth, there had never been in all disasters combined into one so instant an annihilation of human life in one city as in this once beautiful Calverinian city of Abbieann ... Starring realized as he glanced over the scene, that in a few moments, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, the concussion of explosions, and floods, and blasted air caused by the explosions, an immense population was destroyed, a vast city three times the size of an American New York, flung into ruin, with two quarters swept away, and hundreds of miles of vegetation burned from the face of the country, a flood that wiped out more cities and towns than the United States boasts of, and panic shook the souls of scores of millions.¹⁰⁷

It is difficult to grasp the fact that this brief quotation must stand for hundreds and hundreds of pages during which Starring travels, for months, through scenes of destruction and desolation: a landscape, indeed a world, destroyed. It is essential too to realize that during those months Darger, while writing, was traveling through the same mental landscapes; and that these scenes of annihilation are, in fact, depictions of an internal state of being, a dark and damaged space within the self. Through the explorations and ruminations of Walter Starring, Darger seems to be trying to understand the mechanisms of destruction, the terrible forces which can decimate a world or a life. Intuitively, he penetrates deeper and deeper into a strange and primitive geological realm in the process of disintegration.

"... I would not be afraid to say that it seemed to be as if the mountains literally walked, that from the concussion landslides eddied like great waterfalls, that crevasses occurred or opened that swallowed houses and trains, and farms and villages were swept away under a rising and falling sea of loose earth, and so on ...

"Owing to the unusual character of the conditions of the hillsides, fantastic effects were produced upon the surface of the earth which they said gives the observer the feeling that he is on some strange planet still in the forming stage ... Likely no earthquake in any annals of science ever could have changed the physical geographical conditions of any land as did in this story happen to the physical geography of the affected region of the Calverinian lands to the extent of the Abbieann cataclysm ...

"It is in the hill countries that the strange and immense slides occurred, burying or carrying away villages, covering level farmed valleyed floors with a debris of rocks and trees, damming up stream beds, and turning wide valleys into lakes ... The other half of the region was a rolling plateau and in this district the soil being brittle but firmer, did not slide but cracked into countless fissures ... The awful slip apparently occurred in the rock bed underlying the hard plateau, and sent vibrations to the surface in varying degrees of intensity, according to the nature of the soil and the thickness of the ground blanket, which acted as a sort of cushion."¹⁰⁸

Darger may well have borrowed some of this material from his readings on natural disasters, but as he becomes ever more detailed and precise it is clear that his imagination has been unleashed, allowing him to indulge in wild geological theory and unhindered scientific fantasy.¹⁰⁹ He does so with intense seriousness, moving rapidly from the regional to the cosmic, from amusing speculations to inventions of genius. Throughout *The Realms* one encounters a curious pseudo-science explaining nature's lawlessness on an ever grander scale.¹¹⁰ Huge land masses sink and solid earth changes place with water:

Those who could have visited the scene of the event could have observed that a tract of land many miles in extent near the town of Little Anna Aronburg, became mysteriously covered with water ten to fourteen feet deep after the explosion and concussion, and half an hour afterward the water as suddenly disappeared and

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left a strange stratum of sand in its place. Simultaneously, elsewhere large lakes some twenty five miles in width and fifty in extent were formed in the course of half an hour, and others were simultaneously drained.¹¹¹

The sky darkens, and the sun is blotted out:

From these explosions which had been extremely deafening and which had destructive force, there suddenly came belching forth vast quantities of smoke clouds, earth, dust, and debris to great heights. The millions of tons of dust, debris, and wreckage and earth from these fifteen hundred mine explosions quickly saturated the upper atmosphere of the Calverinia country, and formed a screen which prevented the full warmth of the sun's rays reaching the country of Calverinia and which was exactly as if a giant sunshade had been spread over the sky.¹¹²

Darger's wide-ranging observations and speculative ideas are supported by precise descriptions, exact geographical indications, elaborate statistics, and compulsive detail. His fantasy is that of a visionary for whom the Unreal may be said to exist.

... the most remarkable features of this whole disaster was the great and unusual topographical changes it made and threatened to make in the bed of our great Lake MicHollester. In some places the lead telegraphic cables sank fully twenty or forty fathoms deeper in this enormous and deep lake than it was previous to the catastrophe, before finding bottom ... Even the lake is completely non-navigable to any big ships because of the crash, and the unusual seismological changes are not

only made in the bed of the lake to an extent which makes navigation impossible but the water has risen as the flooded rivers of the south pour in the lake in enormous torrents ... All charts of that portion of the sea is utterly useless, and stranger than fiction, in places where previously there had not remained enough water for a thirteen foot ship, the water is deep enough now to float a battleship, while many well known shoals charted as a menace entirely disappeared. The concussion of the explosions had altered the bottom of the lake to such an extent as to be beyond recognizing, and yet the scientists say the disturbance was not that of nature. How could the enemy create a disaster that could do this?¹¹³

Set free by cataclysm, Darger's imagination reaches into the core of the planet, sweeps across the continents, troubling the air, and circles the globe with strange electrical currents and magnetic waves.

Finally as witnesses declared there accompanied every explosion the strange phenomena seen in volcanic eruptions except electricity, gases, and magnetism, but some do declare that there was such occurrence, which while not probably really occurring, yet such news have been conspicuously brought to our attention and should lead to important deductions upon the origin of the magnetic storms that followed every explosion, and whether the nature of the earth's interior underground had anything to do with it or not ... The unusual explosions were accompanied by a terrific and strange fireworks like

display. A unusually great magnetic storm accompanied the explosions which were recorded all over the world and which indicated a connection between them and the explosions.¹¹⁴

Forgetting for the moment that *The Realms of the Unreal* are located on another planet, Darger traces the magnetic waves set off by the explosions at Abbieann around the earth to New York, and back. The epicenter of the vast explosion becomes a temporary magnetic pole. Starring explains.

... among the many other incidents connecting with this explosion, we can specially mention the wonderful system of divergent ripples that started in the atmosphere from the point at which the great explosions took place ... The unusual and initial impetus was so tremendous that these waves spread for many thousands of miles. They diversified in fact, until they put a mighty girdle round the whole world, on a great circle of which the explosion region near Abbieann was the pole ... Thus the waves completely embraced the earth. Every part of our atmosphere had been set into a tingle by the great explosion.

In America, the great waves affecting magnetic needles in all headquarters passed over the heads of the people, the air in the streets of every city trembled from the explosive impulse. The very oxygen supplying the lungs of the people responded also to the supreme convulsion which took place so far away.¹¹⁵

These rich and imaginative theories, strangely moving in their poetic beauty and breadth of vision, contain enough truth to make it evident that Darger had been reading widely, and that he was embroidering on facts derived from the study of natural catastrophe. At the same time, he is straining to go beyond the reality of war and human destructiveness, while also surpassing nature at its own game. It is worth reminding ourselves that he was writing well before the first atomic bomb was exploded over Nagasaki in 1945, an event which forced all of us to begin grappling with visions of a nuclear holocaust, and with the idea of explosions truly capable of disturbing life on the planet.¹¹⁶ What is significant, is that he seems to have been feeling his way, intuitively but quite precisely, toward such an explosive event, imagining the surface of the earth, at least in Calverinia, pock-marked with huge craters, the remains of violent explosions which don't appear to represent traces of volcanic activity. What becomes apparent is that Abbieann was destroyed, not by a single gigantic explosion, but by many occurring more or less simultaneously.

The explosions occurred within less than fifteen minutes, and occurred at many different spots and not in one place. The resulting geology of the landscape as shown after the disaster, proves the disaster was unusually severe for even its own nature.¹¹⁷

Into the Dark Hole

Craters, as irrational openings in the earth terrifying in their immense size and depth, become the focus of Walter Starring's investigation as he travels through wild fire storms and vast flood planes to reach one isolated crater after another. Once again, Darger subtly evokes a sense of mystery. Starring knows what to expect from a volcano, but he does not find what he expects.

No evidence as yet has been deduced showing that the present explosions was produced by the enemy or not, or by accident or design, neither is there, except in the craters, any condition which yet enables us to hypothesize a deposit of materials which would show the cause and so forth of these great blasts.¹¹⁸

His research centers on the craters themselves, on possible fumes still present, on their puzzling shape and internal structure, and on the character of the material radiating out from the site of the explosion. For Darger too, it would seem, these huge openings in the earth, signs of violent mutilation of the earth's body, are also of consuming, though disguised, interest. He too is concerned to know whether these holes are manmade or natural. The intrepid Starring, more courageous perhaps than his creator, Darger, is drawn irresistibly down into their depths.¹¹⁹

Starring, after his visit to the first enormous break in the earth caused by the explosions, went to another, a surprisingly monstrous pit thirty miles in circumference and two thousand feet deep ... Starring was awe stricken at this sight, and could not comprehend what really must have done this ...

He decided to enter the crater, which was affected by means of strong ropes. He let himself down to the farthest extremity below the dark hole of the pit, but seeing by the aid of a torch water below the dark aperture, and not knowing how deep it was, he gave up the intention of landing below, but to go far enough down to see the interior ... It looked to him like a cavern, however, but not made by nature. It was evident the explosion dug this cavern too. All of the debris of the crater and around it above was all earth rocks and stone. Nevertheless it was an awful margin, and as Starring looked down over the crater walls he wondered what explosion must really have produced such awful big holes.¹²⁰

Almost an entire volume is now given over to Starring's voyage of discovery in the region of the craters, with crater after crater visited in turn. It has to be admitted that there is a curious indecisiveness about Starring's research, a compulsive prolongation of his attempt to understand, as though he is reluctant to face the facts. Significantly too, none of this material, despite the intensely pictorial nature of Darger's imagery, ever found its way into the collage-drawings.

Only in volume ten, with the help of the Vivian girls, does he finally unravel the mystery of the explosions and their craters, demonstrating their origin, not in nature, but in the machinations of the evil Glandelinians. The solution finally offered to us is disappointing. There is a disparity between the immense geological vision hinted at over many hundreds of pages by Darger, and the puerile

discoveries of the children. It appears that Starring's hunger for knowledge, his terrible drive to understand, is ultimately abandoned as he regresses into a child's adventure story, and accepts a solution to the mystery scarcely worthy of the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew. Having glimpsed Darger's potential genius, we are now confronted by his relative failure, his retreat into adolescence and the innocent world of childhood. Or have we simply moved from the viewpoint of the scientist to that of the no less creative writer and artist?

"What ever this convulsion was that destroyed Abbieann and so many other places, and made the world record breaking flood, was no volcanic eruption!" said Catherine Vivian most decidedly. "I'd give anything for clues as to the real causes." said Daisy.¹²¹

Darger now provides the reader with a clue still unknown to the children, a striking admission that he knows more than he lets on.

What they would have seen had they looked more closely would have been of great interest to them. It was a thick black covered electric wire sticking partly out of the gravel and debris, but if they did observe it they may have thought it was something else or of no importance. Maybe they suspected it to be a tar covered rope. As it was also near to what had been left of a tree they no doubt might have mistook it for a long thin black root. Of course they were not close enough to observe what it really happened to be.¹²²

The children, reverting to childhood, decide to play a game of tag. Walter, not watching where he is going, trips over a "black root," and makes what proves to be a crucial discovery.

"It's a long thick electric wire, embedded in the earth debris," said Violet to Starring as she herself bandaged his wrist, hand, and arm. "I believe in tripping you pulled up more than a hundred feet of it." "An electric wire, are you sure?" "Positive," exclaimed Violet. "But we did not touch it. We left it as it was for you to see. I'm wondering how long it is." Starring limped painfully up to it, and examined it carefully. He believed that about one hundred and sixty yards of the wire had been pulled out from under the earth debris which was soft, and as he pulled forward on it and saw more come sliding forward he felt sure a great length of it still remained underneath ... "Suppose we follow it in the other direction. I wonder what we will discover?"¹²³

Now on horseback, they follow the wire away from the crater, pulling it up out of the soft earth, and pursuing it for some eighteen miles, to discover that it is attached to an amazing timing device. A few days later they stumble upon, or more correctly "into," an underground cavern, a manmade excavation, and the secret of the explosions is revealed.

"This is some find indeed," declared one of the scientists nodding. "Yes," said the other. "The contents are not marked on the boxes, but I can tell by these" and he held out some of the arm length green colored sticks. "T.N.T and Gun cotton, besides Nitric Glycerene and dynamite.

There's enough here to cause a 'Believed volcanic outburst.'" ... By having it all carefully weighed by box weight, it was estimated that the figures added up, that there had been 10,000,000 pounds of explosives in that huge cave.¹²⁴

In a curious sense, although the problem of the explosions has been solved and nature exonerated, the mystery remains. While responsibility for nature's upheavals is now seen to rest with the Glandelinians, the earth continues in chaos, and the problem of evil is unresolved. If anything it is made more confusing and obscure, since what appeared to be unexplained and meaningless natural eruptions are now understood as monstrous and incomprehensible expressions of human destructiveness: the vulnerable earth torn and tormented, like the bodies of children, by human evil unleashed. The world grows strangely transparent, permeated with symbols, geology a language of the body and the mind. The mystery grows. The response of the Vivian girls to the unraveling of the puzzle, though unexpected, rings true, for Darger and for us.

Violet and her sisters however were not joyful, proud, or elated with the finding of the many clues. They were not even chagrined or angry. They were frightened. This proved that Glandelinia was exceedingly dangerous, more wild in destructiveness than all the elements the world had seen combined into one since its creation. They were terrified, even though they did not show it.¹²⁵

Water

And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth ... And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.

—Genesis¹²⁶

Darkness, wind, tempest at sea, floods of water, forests on fire, rain, bolts from heaven, earthquakes and ruins of mountains, leveling of cities. Whirlwinds which carry water, branches of trees, and men through the air ... And into the depth of some valley may have fallen the fragments of a mountain forming a shore to the swollen waters of its river; which, having already burst its banks, will rush on in monstrous waves; and the greatest will strike upon and destroy the walls of the cities and farm-houses in the valley.

—Leonardo da Vinci¹²⁷

One of the most unforgettable images in *The Realms*, an image of nature in turmoil which haunted Darger's imagination, is his vision of burning islands of wreckage adrift at night on the dark expanse of the flood. These flickering islands of flame, moving soundlessly on the water and reflected in its obsidian depths serve to remind us that the chaos which he sought involved paradoxical and unsettling mixtures of fire and water, earthquake and tidal wave, explosions, eruptions, and ice. While he focuses, for hundreds of pages, on one form of natural disaster or another, he can switch from fire to flood, from earthquake to explosion, with lightning rapidity. His desire was to bring them all together in a vast symphony of destruction.

My decision to examine the various kinds of natural catastrophe separately was derived from the belief that the different destructive forces in nature may have served distinct psychological purposes, embodying in symbolic form clearly distinguishable territories and functions in Darger's mind. Of the four elements, perhaps it is water, as symbol, which, despite its transparency, is the most obscure. The Realms of the Unreal are subsiding beneath ever increasing floods of indeterminate origin; the clashing armies are threatened with inundation. Cities disappear beneath displaced seas, and corpses drift amidst maelstroms of wreckage. Unquestionably, Darger played consciously with images of the universal flood sent by a cruel God to destroy mankind. His child heroines, adrift on their raft, assume the role of Christian Noahs, as they glide downstream through chaos, destruction, and death.

The Sperryville Horror

Behind all of Darger's visions of catastrophe lurks an explosion: a sudden overwhelming outburst affecting all the senses, a mystery let out of the box. This is particularly true of his account of the events that descended on the city of Schloedertown on the night of November 13, 1912.¹²⁸

... as soon as it grew very dark, Violet and her sisters retired to their cots and went to sleep while several soldiers went on guard by their tent. It may have been about one or half past one when the girls were awakened by a strange thundering sound, a rolling boom as of thunder in the distance. It repeated three times, each crash a little louder than the former, and wondering what it really could be, Violet and Joice arose, and pushing aside the door of the tent took a look outside, but saw nothing. The stars were out and it was below zero.

... and they saw the horizon lighted up by a faint red flash, and then it was strangely darkened as if a black cloud had rose in the sky.¹²⁹

Darger, a pictorial artist to the core, often tells his story through the senses, his mysteries are carefully constructed perceptual puzzles. He depends upon the naive observer, a simple soldier rather than a general.

... An hour had passed, when the guards said to others who questioned them, "I do not know sir why the sky is so red and [for] so long. The glow is in the direction of Schloedertown. It must be a big fire. Later on some officers came riding up ... "Hundreds of buildings in Schloedertown had been wrecked by some mysterious explosion. Far from the city windows had been blown out, and all the ruins are on fire, and the flames is spreading with great speed. The town seems doomed and the inhabitants are fighting to save their belongings. See how bright the light is in the — What the — Why, it's all out! What happened I wonder?"¹³⁰

Thus the scene is set, with Darger tantalizing the reader, misleading us with talk of explosions and fire. Once again, the Vivian girls are awakened; their curiosity and keener perceptions are needed to get at the truth.

In the meantime Violet was suddenly awakened by what at first she could not tell. There was a strange noise outside, making her think of lying on the shore near the sea on a windy day when the waves are dashing high, and yet she could not account for it.

"What's the matter Violet, you look alarmed."

"I hear something like running water."

"Running water! Why, Violet, you might be walking in your sleep. There is no water

here and the stream close by is frozen over ... You must have been dreaming. How could water be running in this tent? Maybe the pitcher is upset, go and look." ... Thinking Violet might be having a strange dream even while awake, Joice got up and followed Violet went outside, and moved toward the bank or where the bank is supposed to be.

Suddenly they were waist deep in cold icy water and some unseen object struck Violet on the neck, knocking her under the flood and making her suffer pain. She quickly however managed to rise to the surface, and was helped ashore by Joice ... At first they wondered where all that water could come from.¹³¹

This question would assume ever greater urgency, ultimately becoming the central mystery, as the floods mount. Starting from a more or less naturalistic flood with explainable causes, Darger pushes off into deeper and darker territory as the Realms of the Unreal are inundated in a sea of water with no apparent source. He is curiously at home in the liquid element, exploring the flooded world over thousands of pages, describing one watery disaster after another in endless detail, alert to every nuance of tragedy. Terror increases as the water rises and the children discover the terrible implications of floods.

"... There is so much water we cannot hardly see land on the other side." ...

"It's a big flood I tell you. Look at all that floating wreckage. I wonder where it all came from? There's enough on the surface of the water to build a city." Violet and her sisters noticed this was true, and they were shocked more still by suddenly

observing coming toward them a long jam of dead bodies of men, women, and children. "Why the water is full of dead people." cried Jennie. "Look, they are in the water everywhere. It is a flood and some town has been washed away."¹³²

Darger offers an explanation. As always the blame rests with the Glandelinians. But once chaos has been unleashed uncontrollable forces take over as nature begins to play a part in war. He understands that something has been let loose that cannot be restrained, the irrational is abroad in the world. The unconscious has flooded the mind, and the result, inevitably, is madness and vision.

And now, the poet of disaster begins to sing of the Sperryville horror.¹³³ He is possessed, drunk on inundation, destruction, and death. In his song is all we seek to understand, if we can but withstand the mounting flood of words. However, this is but one of hundreds of floods described in *The Realms*. Thousands of dams are blown up by both sides in the war, oceans of water let loose; a tidal wave of words extends across volumes as far as the eye can see, with an ever increasing natural disaster laying waste to *The Realms* as the Unreal is submerged beneath the waves.

Down about twenty or more miles south of this lake [Selicia] in the beautiful paradise like valley of the Aronburgs Run River lies the city of Sperryville ...

At about twelve o'clock noon the resistless flood increasing more rapidly tore away the huge forest of trees not so far off and this was the real beginning of the end. The enormous mass of trees were rapidly hurled down upon the doomed town or city, and the lines of every stream was rapidly

obliterated and was nothing but a raging sea. The great trees hundreds of thousands of them like big log jams borne onward leveled everything before them crushing scores of frame houses like egg shells and going unchecked until the flood reached everywhere. Had the jam of trees passed on and spread out on the flood instead of remaining so thickly jammed together, Sperryville might not have met such a horror. There were many dead and dying already and hundreds of weaker houses on the outskirts of the city had been swept away, but just now the dead could be counted by dozens and not yet by hundreds of thousands. The big masses of floating trees formed enormous and impenetrable floating barriers, and still carried all before them. As the flood increased in its rise the people had fled to second floors of their houses or to roof tops and hoped that the flood which they believed was caused by some outburst of the river would subside. For them however there was no longer any chances whatever of getting away, and had they known indeed what was in store for them, the contemplation of their fate would have been enough to make them stark mad indeed.

Only half an hour had elapsed from the time of the other explosions when others were heard, and one minute later the waters of the big lake rushed down upon them, and then the thousands of scoffers realized their folly but too late. The explosions had either tore or shook down the dams or levees of the big lake, and the

immense bodies of water which had rested in a basin fifty five miles wide and nearly half again as long and seventy feet deep at the least was let loose with the purpose to begin the destruction upon general Vivian's camps which the enemy said was intended.

The towering wall of water roared down upon the city of Sperryville with the noise of a great tidal wave that follows an earthquake and rushed with a force and speed that actually carried all before it. Had it not been for the fact that the Aronburgs Run River itself been actually flooded even then, a portion of Sperryville might have been saved. This river however was too flooded already to receive enough of the water to check such a mighty torrent, and the river itself went over its banks and clear over the highest levees with the same force and fury pouring into the city like a Niagara, and at once half of the houses of the big town were swept from their foundations and hurled with force and speed against neighboring houses, and crushed each the other so suddenly that immediately this formed a immense jam of wreckage. This of course prevented the flood from passing on in this direction for the moment and allowed the main flood to swirl around in an opposite direction straight, as you would say, across the river in a foaming sea of waves, forcing the river itself like a tidal wave back into the rest of the town from the west ...

The flood increased and increased, and hurled itself against the long jam of wrecked houses in succession of big waves,

and each wave carried with it thousands of houses, furniture, and legions of human beings. For a half hour the long jam of wreckage stood firm, but finally the pressure of the flood grew and grew, then came the main torrent, a towering wall of water more than fifty feet high, which swept the almost impenetrable and immovable barrier before it as if it were only a reed, and the rest of the city was crushed down and part of it entirely washed away¹³⁴ [8.13].

IN CONTEMPLATING THIS AMAZING DESCRIPTION of the sudden displacement of vast masses of water and their deadly impact on helpless humankind, the thought, and indeed the work, of another artist inevitably comes to mind: Leonardo da Vinci, whose *Deluge* drawings might well serve as illustrations for Darger's text.¹³⁵ There is, as well, a striking, but undoubtedly coincidental, similarity between Leonardo's verbal descriptions of the deluge as he envisions it, and Darger's account of the floods in *The Realms*. Like Leonardo, Darger seems to be caught up in conceptualizing water as an overwhelmingly powerful physical force. He visualizes vast volumes of water, full of latent potential, at rest behind a huge dam, held captive in an enormous manmade lake. He enters imaginatively, step by step, into what must occur when this great weight is set free: a gigantic wall of water suddenly on the move, plunging downward with irresistible force. He seems compelled to visualize the destructive power of the great wave, the inability of all previously existing water courses to contain the liquid avalanche, the obliteration of all boundaries as it swirls out across the land, "til the

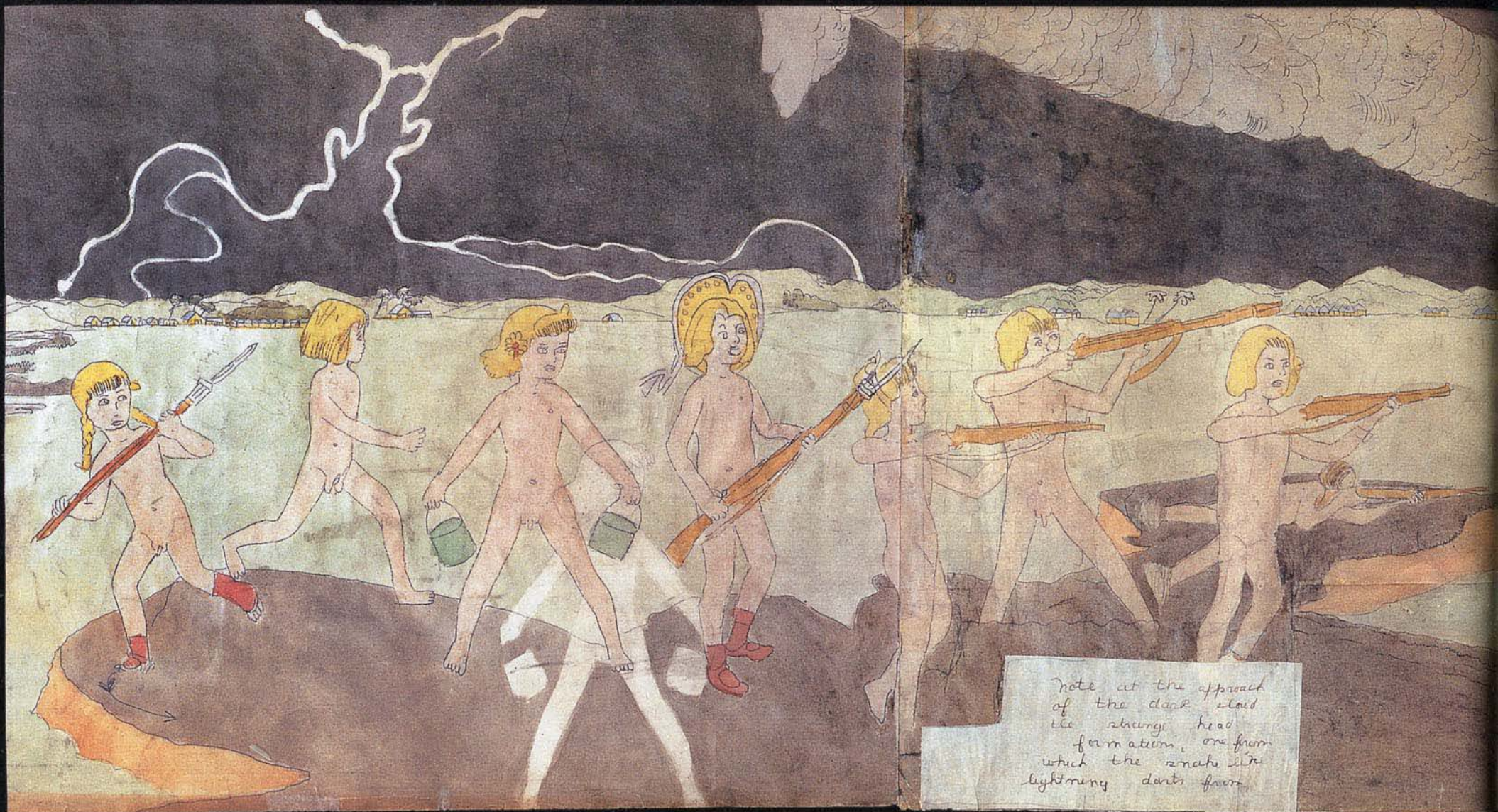


8.13

Henry Darger

During approach of second storm they seize a Glandelinian officer who was in swimming. Note at the approach of the dark cloud the strange head formation, one from which the snake like lightning darts from.

Collage-drawing. Watercolor, carbon, and pencil on paper. 19 x 69 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



8.13

Henry Darger

During approach of second storm they seize a Glandelinian officer who was in swimming. Note at the approach of the dark cloud the strange head formation, one from which the snake like lightning darts from.

Collage-drawing. Watercolor, carbon, and pencil on paper.
19 x 69 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

During approach
of second storm they
saw a glaucous office
who was in swimming



swollen rivers overflow and submerge the wide lands and their inhabitants."¹³⁶ It is astonishing to see him considering the geological topography of *The Realms*, examining land formations and how they may contribute to the flood.

Like Leonardo, Darger conceives of obstructions, great barriers able briefly to restrain the rushing torrent, only in order, finally, to depict their disintegration as the great wave descends upon them, "the trees floating uprooted, and whirling in the huge waves."¹³⁷ Truly astonishing is his portrayal of the conflict of waters, the enormous volume of water from the overflowing Aronburgs Run, turned back in its path by the cascades descending unrestrained from the dam above, "forcing the river itself like a tidal wave back into the rest of the town from the west." The conceptualization of what happens when one body of water struggles for dominance with another is evident both in Leonardo's pictorial water studies, and in his verbal descriptions. "And the whirling waves which fly from the place of concussion, and whose impetus moves them across other eddies going in a contrary direction, after their recoil will be tossed up into the air."¹³⁸

It was only, however, in the great *Deluge* drawings that the Florentine master truly went beyond mere investigation of hydraulic processes, to a disturbingly subjective vision of cataclysm.¹³⁹ Then, like Darger, he was driven compulsively to describe forces in conflict which might have been evident at the world's beginning or at its end. As with Leonardo, so with Darger, one is inevitably led to consider what internal, psychological, forces might have given birth to such apocalyptic

imagery. Are such unrestrained and, at times, overwhelmingly destructive deluges of psychic content, or drives, inherent in genius itself? Are they somehow indicative of the potential, for good or evil, of the creative intellect, an uncontrolled force of nature, unchained?¹⁴⁰

Darger is perhaps more concerned than Leonardo to consider the effects of the flood on man and his fragile works, examining in painful detail the fate of cities, and the anguish of humankind, caught up in the swirling waters.

The exact number of victims of this most dreadful disaster that probably can ever be written will probably never be estimated, though as to the story nearly 1,200,000 (this many according to the story from the bodies recovered it then can be said is known perished), although it is probable the loss of life may be much greater, were lying dead, scattered all over the country with the wreckage of the city, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property were totally destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of surviving people beggared, not in the city alone but every other place the flood spread to ... and all because the enemy broke up the dams of this lake by means of explosives ...

It was now the first night of the great flood and then it can be said that darkness and a fierce wind and blinding snowstorm and even fire added to the terrors of the situation. Then came flames which even the cold winds and blinding snow of the blizzard could not quench as it was under the wreckage, and this made the disaster

all the more frightful. Wreckage floating on the water in some stages was piled high and on top where it was out of reach of the water it was all ablaze.¹⁴¹

Strange and monstrous images surface from the depths of his mind, and Darger is compelled to give birth in the night to terrible, even impossible spectacles. Again and again we are forced to consider that the lurid reality he describes is somehow a reflection of a world within, that the night sea journey he describes — the flaming islands of wreckage, the cries of victims trapped and burned — exists only as dark constellations adrift in his psyche.

It was a horror beyond comparison. Shrieks and prayers and screams from the unhappy beings imprisoned in the floating masses of debris from the wrecked houses pierced the air ... There were countless unknown numbers of men, women, and even little children held down on the upper layers of the floating jams and were compelled to watch with indescribable agony and terror the flames creeping slowly toward them until they were burned to death, and even those who were not burned quickly enough were either slowly roasted or even frozen to death.¹⁴²

DARGER'S RARE graphic portrayals of floods, in the collage-drawings, are disappointingly tame, when compared with Leonardo's pictorial evocations of water-borne cataclysm. There is a real disparity between the dynamic forces Darger conjures up with words, and his calm and silent pictures of a flooded world. An outstanding example is the almost empty picture *At Jennie Richee. They manage to escape after being pursued and hounded*, although the title makes no mention of a flood (8.14). Smooth and strangely luminous beneath a lowering sky, this calm expanse of water seems to have originated in a different part of his mind; and to depict a later stage in the process of destruction, when the peace of death has descended. Darger's experience of floods and of wild waters unleashed was undoubtedly less extensive than Leonardo's, probably restricted to the watery plane of Lake Michigan extending as far as the eye could see. Living close to the lake shore, he might have had occasion to see the lake tossed into wild fury by winter winds or summer storms.¹⁴³

It is, of course, possible to account for the contrast between his text and pictures on the basis of limitations in his technical skills as a draftsman. He seems to have been largely unaware of the various graphic formulas used to depict extreme movements of water. Yet, given his astonishing pictorial inventiveness and his ability to borrow forms when he needed to, the explanation may lie elsewhere. It is quite certain that Darger invested tremendous effort in mastering the application of watercolor washes over enormous areas, a complex achievement particularly evident in this picture. The technique involves the creation of a minor flood on the horizontal expanse of paper, with water applied liberally all over the surface before

the dilute color is floated into place. He may well have taken pleasure in this controlled flood, eliminating extraneous form so that he could play, unhindered, with the watery element itself.¹⁴⁴ The discovery of a sailing ship, which he could "borrow," and set adrift in the distance, provided the single form that could transform a broad field of color into a vast expanse of water stretching from the bottom of the page clear across to the horizon: an amazing evocation of empty space.

The one device that he borrowed for representing water is the conventional formula used in coloring books and comics to depict a splash, or the folding over of a small wave. These little eruptions of white water are as close as he was to come to the massive waves that sweep across his written pages and through *The Realms*. The Vivian girls, who often seem able to run on water, seem here to be enjoying a day at the beach. Only the little slave girl, her finger raised uncertainly to her mouth, seems lost, her ever present pail an ineffectual tool for dealing with the deluge. She alone seems troubled by an awareness of all that has disappeared beneath the waves. Yet Darger is aware of the disparity between unfeeling nature and human experience.

All the days after the flood were beautiful. For days the sky was unspeakably serene and smiling. The air though scorching hot for days, was mild and gentle and the nights just right. Yet no one could sleep profoundly for everyone who wake up and again look upon scenes of chaos and desolation. Seas of water and floating wreckage out in the country, shattered buildings and gaping walls in the cities and towns that survived the flood, countless

thousands of fallen and torn trees lying brown and dead amidst masses of timbers, as if a maelstrom had twisted them together. All these things the survivors saw in the steaming sunshine and then again and again came the realization ...

And suddenly Darger seems to have turned inward, and to be speaking of very different, far more subjective, experiences of "emotional flooding" and of personal loss.

Face to face with death is awesome indeed seeing what this human flesh is like after the spark of life is gone, both awesome and horrible. The curt saying, "she was beautiful in death," is shown to be a mockery, a mere delusion, a mere saying of no account whatever for beauty lasts only a few hours after death, except through the effects of art. This also is both awesome and horrible, but it is not sorrow.¹⁴⁵



8.14 left
Henry Darger
At Jennie Richee.
They manage to escape
after being pursued
and hounded. Collage-
drawing. 19 x 70 in.
 ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The Flooding of the Mind

As the floods grow more and more extensive, Darger's description of their effects becomes ever more specific and detailed. As usual, he relies on eyewitness accounts of dramatic rescues and the tragic personal stories of survivors. He seems surprisingly aware of their, and his, natural tendency toward exaggeration.

Some of the most miraculois escapes of some of the survivors of the disaster, even if they happened in this story or in reality, could be almost beyond belief. Many were the stories of those who rode down the flood torrent on house tops, which experience of any thrilling story was not ever read of in any thrilling fiction book or magazines, and even then if submitted to the most sensational magazines they absolutely would be respected as being too wildly exaggerated or improbable.¹⁴⁶

Elsewhere nearly fourteen families were thrown into the flood, when a big house on whose roof they had taken refuge gave way. All were rescued, one being carried down the course of the flood for eight hundred yards and then being rescued by a dog who pulled him to shore. Just as one of the bridges was swept out, a girl clinging to the roof of a small house which was being swept downstream waved a red cloth at the people on the shore and then was lost to view, as the house crumpled when it struck a wreckage jam.¹⁴⁷

Such scenes obviously cry out for pictorial representation, and some of them did find their way into the later illustrations; for example the collage-drawing *At Cedernine. Two boys come to the rescue, and one attracts the little Vivian girls who come in [gap] to help* (8.15). The entire upper part of this composition may have been borrowed, although the tree trunk on which the boys are located seems a uniquely Dargerian form. However, the small group of living and dead children in the water below was unmistakably invented on the spot, a delightful pastiche of bodies and heads of children half-immersed in the pale green water. Despite the rope being offered as a lifeline by one of the boys, the floating children's only real hope of rescue depends on the swift arrival of the Vivian girls.

MORE THAN THE OTHER forms of natural disaster, floods seemed to provoke Darger to swift, almost macabre, alternation between grim accounts of death and destruction, and surprising moments of zany humor. For example, the flood provides the Blengiglomenean creatures, who are excellent swimmers, with a marvelously extended habitat (8.16). "[C]aught by the floods while asleep," they "swam the flood waters either in consternation or delight." Along with the risk of getting themselves entangled in all manner of submerged buildings, however, there is the danger of getting stuck when the floods subside. One is found on the third floor of a building where "he remained for days and days ... However food was tossed up to him, and water lowered to the window of his room by ropes."¹⁴⁸

Such moments of comic relief are mere intervals in an ever more desolate vision of a world destroyed. The reality Darger is describing is fundamentally dark, with human life at the mercy of chance.

8.15 right
Henry Darger
At Cedernine. Two boys come to the rescue, and one attracts the little Vivian girls who come in [gap] to help. Left panel of a two-panel composition. Collage-drawing. 24 x 37 in.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.





8.16

Henry Darger

40 At Jenny Richee. Facing attack by Blengiglomeneans who mistake them for little Glandelinians because they wore gray uniforms, the only way to save themselves is to undress & hide the Glandelinian uniforms.

Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper.

18 3/4 x 69 3/4 in. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia.

T. Marshall Hahn Collection, 1997.52.1. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

Death, abandonment, and loss seem to be the fate of all, with hope, even in God, mere illusion. With much of the land engulfed, and whole cities lost, the remaining territories are crowded with refugees traveling from place to place. Not surprisingly, many of the victims of the flood succumb to mental illness, and Darger is particularly interested in this group of sufferers, who respond to overwhelming terror and loss with symptoms of severe stress, even going insane. As he points out, "The story of the horrors of that sea of broken and shattered trees and floating debris cannot be fully told. None of the rescuers and relief parties could even look at the scene without a shook to his sensibilities."¹⁴⁹ In volume four, an entire chapter is devoted to the psychological effects of the flood. "Insanity follows frightful suffering of the poor victims. Countless thousands of demented one's apparent indifference to the loss of relatives."¹⁵⁰

Strangely, the flood itself seems to possess powerful feelings, its uncontrolled behavior apparently indicative of terrible intensities of irrational anger.

On and on the flood had progressed, smashing overturning and crushing to atoms everything in its path, seeming to abandon everything wholly to rage. The flood really had fits of fury beyond anything known, seeming to abandon itself wholly to rage, having for four days been exceedingly dangerous.

It is as if nature herself had become psychotic.

... the maelstrom of destruction being maniacal. They were immense streams of debris rushing in drunken rage swirling anyways, anyhow, and tons of wreckage collapsed into splinters in that collision with massive houses, which fell apart like

monstrous splashes at once becoming like a wild hellish sea a thousand times confounded and like anarchy, a regular hell sea of wreckage and water gone mad.

The writing, with its endless circling, its repetitions, its returns and renewals, is like the waters of the flood, rushing forward, swirling around, lapping, lapping, lapping, unceasingly, like waves, until everything is undermined and collapses under the weight of words and images. Driven to extremity, Darger desperately searches for words, even huge numbers, to contain his excitement. He is moving out beyond nature, with his irrational floods of anger in danger of overwhelming his world. Realism is abandoned, replaced by expressionistic intensity and a bizarre language of the senses. Color assumes unusual importance, and strange sounds are heard. Darger is yielding to hallucinatory experience that is largely visual, a pictorial artist is being called into being.¹⁵¹

The day dawned shadowless and gray and gray the day remained, however, without further rain, but at seven there were mad bursts of rain and severe thunderstorms. Evening brought with the concluding of the thunderstorm and the increase of the flood a most sinister apparition looming through the cloud rents in the western skies, a scarlet sun in a greenish black sky. His sanguine disk, appalling and strangely magnified, seemed barred like the belted body of a planet. An hour or more and the crimson specter vanished, and the moon-less and starless night came with glows of fire far in the distance piercing the horizon and making the flood look all the more weird. Then the roar of the flood waters grew very

weird. Its sound ceased being a breath, it became like a thundering voice yelling across the world, the shrieks of victims made nightmare sounds, the mooing of the rushing waters seemed to deepen, more and more abysmally through all the hours of darkness.¹⁵²

Conferences and Theories

Given the enormity of the floods inundating *The Realms*, and their increasingly irrational nature, it comes as no surprise to learn that conferences are organized in the hope of explaining the cause and extent of the floods. Once again various professors, including the great authority Hendro Dargar, are invited to express their opinions, and to put forward their scientific theories. Dargar, whose particular interest is in the connection between floods and the other forms of natural disaster, has organized a major research project, drawing on written contributions from all over the flooded countryside. The result is two important publications on floods written by Dargar himself: "On the Wars two worst floods in the History of the World" and "The Collection of the Most Remarkable Casualties which happened in the two Late Dreadful floods both by sea, by land and river."¹⁵³

Dargar's theories about floods, and the intimate connection linking floods and other forms of natural disaster, are, to say the least, unique. The fundamental question raised at the conferences concerned the source of so much water: "The greatest mystery of all pertaining to the catastrophe is where did all the water come from."¹⁵⁴ Floods of natural origin are readily explained, but deluges

on the scale envisioned by Darger, and Leonardo as well, do pose serious questions concerning the origin of vast quantities of water. Even Leonardo understood that floods which covered the highest mountains could not be explained on the basis of rainfall and rising rivers.

Darger offers no real solution to this problem, though he clearly understands that so enormous a quantity of water poses difficulties never previously encountered.¹⁵⁵ One of his more astonishing theories concerns the sinking of the land beneath the weight of the waters.

Hendro Dargar, the eminent geologist, and authority on forest fires, earthquakes, and volcanology, declared that there was grave danger that most of the softer earth inundated so deeply by the floods will sink lower than their former level before the weight of the flood.¹⁵⁶

Like Leonardo, Darger visualized mountains being undermined by water, and suddenly sliding into the flood.¹⁵⁷

... very serious and unusual transformations occurred in the vicinity of Abbieann, where a considerable part of the south end of the city and the land and hills even slid into the lake, leaving a wide inlet in place of that part of the enormous city.¹⁵⁸

He was aware of the catastrophic explosions possible when molten rock of volcanic origin comes into contact with water.

A volcano in the path of the flood had been affected, as the waters had forced its deepest fissures with tons of rocks, and rent and tore open other fissures sweeping millions of tons of water into its focus, and thus the volcano got into such a violent activity which raged for three days.¹⁵⁹

THE COLLAPSE OF MOUNTAINS, accompanied by earthquakes, and the sinking of the coast lines of *The Realms*, inspired Darger with visions of enormous tidal waves sweeping inland, drowning cities, and overleaping coastal mountain ranges. Leonardo too had such visions. "Then the angry sea is relieved of its rage, but sometimes overcome by the winds, it escapes from the ocean beds, and plunges over the high banks of neighboring promontories, where, coming over the summits of mountains, it descends into the valleys opposite."¹⁶⁰

About only one moment after the shock had ceased, the waters of the big Angeline Bay rushed suddenly and with the most incredible velocity and force into the river and over the land like a mountain of water. The water of this arm of the Calverinian seas had been ebbing for a long time ... but nevertheless the sea at the mouth of the big Aronburg Run rose instantly above the high water mark for more than seventy feet. It was the same tidal wave that had rushed over the land for more than twenty miles from the beach.¹⁶¹

Darger compares the various forms of floods, those caused by cyclonic storms at sea, those resulting from tidal waves and the displacement of oceans, with those resulting from the sinking of the land and the rise of inland waters of unknown origin.

The best of gifted writers have written and told of terrible storms at sea, of the wrecking of vessels, or of the devastation of towns and cities on the shore, where hundreds nay scores of thousands of lives were at stake and even lost. Gifted writers have written and told of most disastrous land storms that occurred, big floods of

other kinds, earthquakes and the like, and the awful results of avalanches down the mountain side, or of big tidal waves sweeping with terrible results upon the shore. Yet that task pales into the most insignificance when compared with the attempted task of telling of a big flood.¹⁶²

The Children in the Flood

Of the four elements, it is water which is the natural plaything of children, providing them with possibilities of adventure and sensual excitement. Large sections of *The Realms* are devoted to the water-borne adventures of the children as they drift, in relative safety, downstream through the Unreal. Curiously, the Vivian girls do not participate in most of the longer journeys on the flood. Excellent swimmers, they use water as a means of escape, and they are seldom in danger of drowning. However, unwilling to leave them completely untouched by any of nature's upheavals, Darger allows us to believe for a short time (in volume twelve [unbound]) that six of the seven heroines have perished in a flash flood. Violet is left unharmed and alone, to mourn their loss.

Naturally, as experienced readers of *The Realms*, we know that the missing Vivian sisters have probably been rescued and are doubtless alive and well, but for a long while their whereabouts remain unknown, and they are assumed by their friends to have perished in the flood. Their reappearance occurs in a truly spectacular manner, with Darger staging a train wreck, and sacrificing an entire train load of children, as an appropriate mechanism for their return to life. This mechanical disaster is

beautifully merged with natural catastrophe, with rain, steam, and speed mingled in the flood, in a spectacle worthy of Turner.¹⁶³

At one point where the flood was wildest, a long railroad bridge probably crossing a wide valley spanned across, having been also mysteriously spared despite the near approach of the foe. Trains had crossed it even after the great Glorinia Francis Anna warstorm, but now, unknown to all, this whole railroad line nearest the bridge and the bridge itself being harassed by the flood was all in a fearful shape. All the underpinning, piles and spiles, were unsafe on the long bridge, and Evans was the first to notice it ...

Even then the smoke of a coming train was visible down the line ... Whirling the three colonels peered at the oncoming train which was completely loaded with children, and then it happened, so naturally, so smoothly, that it was like a thing rehearsed and prepared for and planned for. The train rushed by them at a tearing speed, fanning the blanched cheeks of the christian soldiers and officers, with the wind of its passage. Violet screamed and hid her face from the awful sight ...

The train advanced swiftly toward the roaring chasm. It was a moment of staring eyes from speechless christian officers, a flying leap of the immense engine into space, and the deafening crash of falling timbers, a score of the rear coaches crashing through the floor of the bridge. For seconds it seemed the express poised in space, then the entire remaining half of the bridge gave way, with an ear splitting roar, and

the whole train plunged to the raging waters below amid the clouds of shrieking steam from the drowned boiler that rose like a pall to the watchers. The roofs of the cars were just visible and from beneath them arose the heart rending death calls of the entombed ones ...

Below, in the raging waters, the engine coughed in death agonies, while the twisted tops of the cars protruded like ghostly tombstones. The water was a maelstrom of wreckage, and struggling children and guardians. Scores of children were climbing dazedly out of broken windows with curious listlessness, as though they did not care particularly to escape. Below them, as the christian officers gazed with horrid fascination, floated many mangled bodies of poor little children being swirled hither and thither at the mercy of the furious torrents.¹⁶⁴

There follows an account of Evans's heroic rescue of all the living children. Imagine his surprise when it is discovered that all six of the missing Vivian girls are among the survivors rescued from the train wreck, each one happily having been saved from the roaring waves.

Throughout his life, Darger took a passionate interest in train wrecks, collecting every picture of these tragic events he could find. One of his greatest pictures is unmistakably the collage-drawing *After McWhorter Run* (8.17). Though not exactly a natural disaster, this train wreck, also staged on a collapsing bridge, is one of the few collage-drawings which can truly be said to equal, if not surpass, Darger's written descriptions of awesome destruction caused by nature. The scene

combines fiery explosions, houses rocked by earthquake, the struggle of battle and massacre, with the towering pylons of the collapsing bridge, and the tangled ruin of a train which has hurtled off the massive viaduct into empty space. Smashed and broken passenger cars teeter at wild angles in the darkness. Darger has drawn on his experience with illusionistic collage to construct this complex scene of manmade disaster. It is one of the most elaborate and convincing spatial recessions he ever attempted, with the ruined trestle and scattered railroad cars carefully positioned to force the eye deep into space. He avoids confusion by silhouetting individual combatants against the surrounding darkness, with only occasional human forms, trees, or houses illuminated by exploding shells. With dazzling patches of bright color, and sudden flashes of orange and yellow fire bursting in the inky black, the effect is both terrifying and overwhelmingly dramatic. No other picture by Darger captures so completely his boyish delight in cataclysm, as well as his love of violent spectacle, rich color, light, and movement.

8.17

Henry Darger

*After McWhorter Run.
Glandelinians attack
and blow up train
carrying children to
refuge. Collage-
drawing. Watercolor,
carbon tracing, and
collage on pieced
paper. 123 x 36 3/4 in.
Collection of the
American Folk Art
Museum, New York.
Promised gift of Sam
and Betsey Farber.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.*



after McWhorter Run
Glandelinians attack and blow up
train carrying children to re-
fuge

And the Raft Sails On

In the midst of watery chaos, indeed surrounded by all the forms of natural disaster simultaneously decimating *The Realms*, Darger imagines a small floating island of peace and security, a raft adrift on the waters of the flood. In a curious sense, such an island of relative peace seems also to have existed in Darger's mind, an area of stillness at the center of the storm within. Once on the raft, the children are safe; out in midstream on the vast flood plain they are isolated from the fury of battle and the ever present dangers of explosions and fire. The mood changes, growing lighter. The children become children again, and one senses that within the author too tranquility briefly reigns. It has become safe to be a child, safe to play or dream. Where in Darger's life had there ever been such a safe space? We glimpse the raft through Walter Starring's eyes:

He came to a low ridge close to the river, and climbed up through thick birches and poplars. At the top was a large stretch of bare ground over which the soldier and ranger had already passed. Walter paused there, and looked down on the broad sweep of the MicHollester Run.

What he saw was like a great picture spread out on the great bosom of the river and the yellow and white strip of shoreline. Still a quarter of a mile upstream, floating down slowly with the current, was a mighty raft, something which he had not expected to see, and for a space his eyes took in nothing else. On many a river he had seen thousands of rafts used by the military, but never a raft like this.

It was two hundred feet in width, and three or four times as long, and it looked to him like a little city swept up from out of some mysterious land to be transplanted to the river. It was dotted with tents and canvas shelters. Some of these were purple, green, blue, and yellow, and some were white, and six or seven were striped like the Angelinian Flag. Behind all these was an absolute wooden house, and over this there arose a long tender staff from which floated the National Abbieannian flag.

The raft was alive. Men in splendid uniforms were running between the tents. The long rudder sweeps however looked dull in the evening darkness gathering, and once again the glow of the forest fires appeared, and now the raft looked like a little city swept out or up from some archaic and savage desert land in the glare of the fires. Rowers with naked arms and shoulders were straining their muscles in fifteen big boats that were pulling like ants at the giant mass of timber. And in the woods on two sides, everything seemed to be alive, and glancing closely that way he saw the woods alive with soldiers thicker than an earth full of ants of purple color is seemed. Aronburg's army had arrived, and to Walter's ears came a deep monotone of thousands of human voices, the chanting of soldiers as they marched.¹⁶⁵

In its origins the raft was undoubtedly borrowed from Mark Twain. It is the simple log structure on which Huck and Jim floated down the Mississippi. But, as with all such borrowings in Darger, it has grown in size and significance; indeed from its first appearance it is conceived of as many rafts joined together, a super-raft designed to withstand the dangers of journeying through a sea of obstacles. It is also a small military encampment, commanded by a courageous squadron of girl scouts, and manned by an able group of helpful boys and a complement of Christian soldiers.

The raft becomes a base of operations, which can be beached whenever the girls feel drawn to adventures on land, hair-raising encounters with the enemy, or dangerous expeditions into the burning forests. All around, on shore, danger lurks.

Even on the water, huge obstacles, floating islands of wreckage or water-borne houses, threaten the travelers with disaster. Submerged forests and antediluvian cities haunt the depths below. Nevertheless, in the hands of capable girl scout leaders these dangers seem far from overwhelming, and the raft secure. Perhaps too, they are accompanied by other travelers on the raft, invisible beings who offer their protection.

"Who knows, but that we may have guardian angels on this trip, and that we may be entertaining them unawares." "Ah, who knows?" There were, as Gertrude felt, angels on the raft, angels who, entertained by her and her followers unawares, had not a little to do with the shaping of all their adventure and its outcome in the future.¹⁶⁶

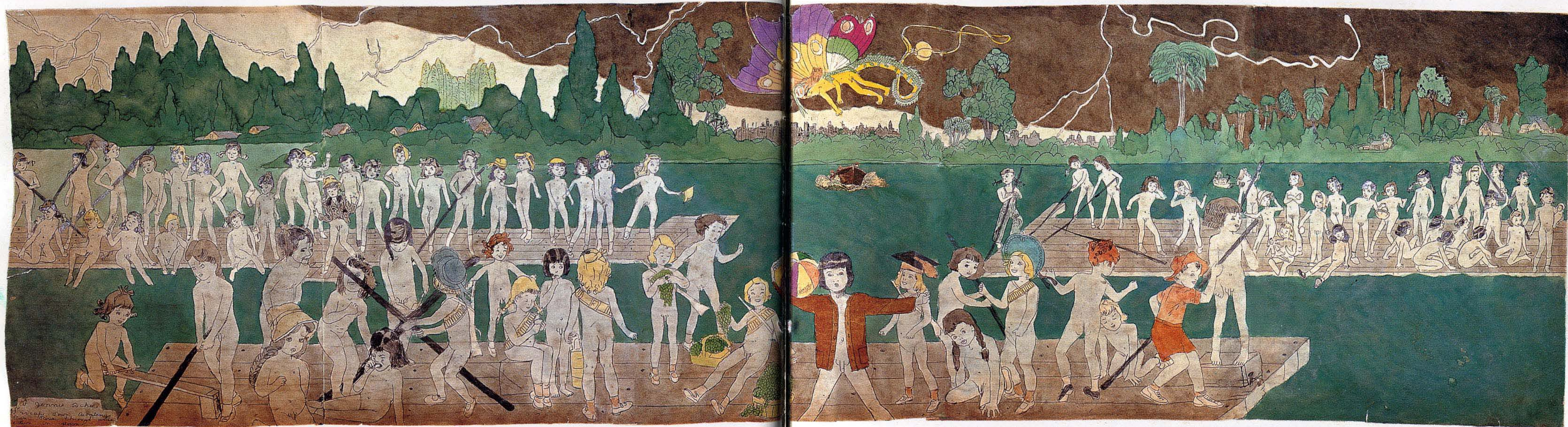
8.18

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Half clothed they escape down the Aronburg Run. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing on pieced paper. 19 x 47 1/2 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



In the collage-drawings the raft at times becomes a smaller, more manageable vessel on a gentler, more tranquil flood. An example is the picture *At Jennie Richee. Half clothed they escape down the Aronburg Run*, in which the raft appears as the kind of simple structure a child might imagine building (8.18). It consists of tree trunks arranged side by side, and held together by rough planks nailed perpendicularly to the logs. It is poled down the river by one little boy. While only the front end of the raft is visible, given the size of the children on board, it can be no more than three or four yards wide. Significantly, none of the girls on the raft is blonde, an observation which accords with the text in that the Vivian girls do not participate in the great girl scout expedition on the flood. One child, armed with a full-scale rifle, wears the standard palette hat of the girl scouts. The others are dressed in fashionable frocks borrowed, along with the children themselves, from fashion illustrations or coloring books. The gentleness of the river landscape, with snug cottages nestling among groves of trees along the shore, the sky filled with fluffy yellow clouds, is suggestive of a day in midsummer. The children might almost be attending a summer camp, with the flood long forgotten. The playful mood is further suggested by the topless girl in slacks who is dancing on the raft; and by the tiny naked children who paddle along in inner tubes on the calm blue river, little watersprites paying a call. Darger's illustration and his text are perfectly matched here, with life on board the raft resembling a tame adventure story written for children. Even the frightening reality of abandoned cities and drifting corpses is kept at bay, through the children's constant activity and childish humor.



8.19

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Escape down Aronburgs Run River through wide section in storm. Collage-drawing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

When everyone and everything was on the raft, it was launched out and began a journey for the whole force, which they never had before in their lives. As long as the flood though which they were going was clear of obstructions, the trip was more fun than anything else, but the boys nevertheless who did the paddling kept their eyes open for everything. At first Gertrude nor Angeline Richee did not know which direction to work the raft. She could guide good on land but with a tossing flood always trying to push the big raft off its course was a difficult undertaking.

After four hours of it they passed the highest houses of some town almost entirely submerged, and close to the raft stood a big hotel which was almost submerged to the very roof. On the left side of the hotel, just barely above the windows that were submerged was the advertisement, in Abbieannian, "Running water in every room." "Yes, indeed," said Dolores, kind of jokingly, "There's an example of honest advertising. The water has run into every room till it is up to the ceiling. Anyone wants a bath, just get in."¹⁶⁷

A FAR MORE COMPLEX depiction of the rafts is seen in the collage-drawing *At Jennie Richee. Escape down Aronburgs Run River...* (8.19). This elaborate painting can serve to remind us that Darger's ability to construct space underwent rapid development, with his genius at placing figures in a naturalistic setting evolving to the point that his compositions are almost able to approach his texts in complexity. While the three rafts in this picture are not notably more elaborate than that in illustration 8.18, the presence of seventy-eight children carefully distributed between them obviously implies a much more difficult compositional challenge. Among the figures on the nearer raft it is possible to make out the seven blonde Vivian sisters.

The scene in this drawing is somewhat more sober. It is probable that the passengers aboard the raft are child slaves who have been rescued by the Vivian girls. Only this can explain the fact that all the children, including the seven sisters, are naked. One of the sisters wears a graduation cap and tassel, presumably intended to serve as a Glandelinian disguise. They are all armed. We must assume that as a result of another of their adventures they have saved a group of child slaves, and are now pushing off for their escape down the Aronburg Run River. As always, Darger is responsive to the weather, in this case an approaching storm. The sky is black, with jagged streaks of lightning streaking across the darkness. The river is in flood, a floating house passes the rafts. The pale bodies of the children are luminous against the deep emerald greens of the lush landscape, and the no less radiant greens of the water. It is the serious, in some cases melancholy, expressions of the slaves which betray the stark fate from which they seem to have escaped. But in the sky,

silhouetted against the darkness, is a particolored Blengin, an indication, if one were needed, of the success of their risky venture. Out on the water they will be safe from their enemies.

ANOTHER, MORE SOMBER source also played a part in calling these rafts into being, the ark in which Noah braved the universal flood at God's command. Darger was keenly aware of this parallel, since the world through which the children travel is a world for the most part destroyed. "Talk about the big deluge in Noah's time ... Why that flood was a heavy dew compared to this." Because of the forest fires burning all around them, and the murderous violence everywhere on land, they see themselves drifting through the deluge into hell. As night comes on, their mood unmistakably darkens. "It puts me in mind of a lake you cross before you go into Dante's Inferno," remarked Jennie Turner, "No stars, no moon, but a black sky overhead."¹⁶⁸

The Night Sea Journey

In describing night on the raft Darger's pictorial genius attains hallucinatory intensity. Fires and floods merge, the night sky is lit by the burning hillsides, and flames reflected in the dark waters turn the clouds overhead to blood. How easily he slips into the demonic.

From the frightful scenes that the darkness of night revealed ... an enormous column of ink black smoke rose from this part of the conflagration to a height estimated by the little girls at eight or perhaps more miles, and then spread rapidly into a huge mushroom shaped cloud, which appeared to have a diameter of eighty or a hundred miles, and which underneath was lighted to a molten iron red color by the glare of the flames underneath.¹⁶⁹

It is as if, once night has descended, Darger finds himself alone. The raft is his room. Outside the world is dark and silent. Most of the children, though present to him, are asleep. He withdraws into his thoughts. At such times strange forces begin to stir within him, obscurer images emerge; memories, longings, desires, rise to the surface of nocturnal consciousness. On the raft, one boy keeps watch, alone in the night. His isolation is palpable.

... the boy walked to the edge of the raft facing landside, and there watched with the help of the light of fires, and the moon trying to shine through the smoke, the many strange objects in the water, and also the strange birds trying to fly here and there over the water and occasionally dashing down to the surface.

... Something was moving on the shore, it could be seen by the motions of distant lights, and George followed as closely as he could the action of the lights, but although they were bright and glaring, he could not make out any figures or anything else in the darkness and the fog.¹⁷⁰

For Darger, the flood in all its moods and stages, turbulent or tranquil, is the deeper mind, into which the light of consciousness but rarely penetrates, and then only obscurely or in brief flashes. In its vastness, mysterious fecundity, and irresistible flow, we have a profound analogy of the ebb and flow of psychic forces within Darger's psyche, as well as of the rich and irrepressible creative drives welling up from the depths of his mind. Like the children, he seems to have drifted with relative stability on the flood, reveling in the excitement and possibilities of adventure it offered. But in deluge there is danger. The mind too can be flooded, inundated in its own depths, trapped or overturned by islands of wreckage (complexes), pulled down by terrible destructive forces deep within. Extreme isolation, secrecy, withdrawal from all human intimacy, seem to have afforded Darger some possibility of survival, a means of maintaining stability in the midst of chaos, of withstanding the mysteriously rising tide within. On the raft, in his room, he was safe.

There is a moment on the raft, early one morning, when one of the boy heroes, Jack Saunders, finds himself alone. Allowing his thoughts to flow with the tide, he drifts free of his moorings. The resulting soliloquy is one of the strangest, most obscure, and yet profoundly revealing passages in *The Realms*. It is perhaps the most intimate and undisguised glimpse we ever have of the mind of Henry Darger.

To Jack and his friends the whole war seemed to be a horrible dark bloody and fiery whirlpool as mysterious and horrifying as some of the scenes depicted in the stories of Hell by great writers, especially like Milton's hell. He would sometimes imagine of being in still water, far away from the center of the maelstrom, though he would imagine of feeling the whirl of the vortex sucking him slowly, irresistibly, inescapably, into itself ...¹⁷¹

As the raft went on ahead the morning advanced, and from the warmer waters of the flood rose thick steamy mists because of the heat and it looked as though the very air was full of ghostly secrets. The white vapor crept painfully up upwards before it ventured to steal away toward the shore. It was very warm. Jack was on sentry duty, and as the raft bore away a little off shore he stared into the murk. His strength was almost exhausted from his almost sleepless night and it was hard for him to be alone so much with his thoughts. They were not proper nor pleasant thoughts, at least they were memories which in his weakness turned homewards and strangely moved him ...

The stillness of beauty and the better zones could be the reason why these memories of former times did not awaken desire so much as sorrow ... a strange inapprehensible melancholy. Once he had had such desires, but they did not return now. They seemed to be all past, they seemed to him to belong to another world that is gone far from him. But here, out in the flood waters, they were completely

lost to him. They arose no more, he seemed to be dead now and in a strange horrid Purgatory, everything seems a horrid apparition, a mysterious reflection drawing him to desire to get out but never succeeding in doing so. Everything seems strong, his desires are strong — but they are always unattainable, and he knew it. And even if these scenes of his younger boyhood days were given back to him he did not believe he would really know what to do or where to go. The tender secret influence that passed from them into him and other children could not rise again, no never. Little girls and boys like these scouts surely long to be in them and to move in them, they longed to remember and to love them, and to be stirred by the sight of them. But now it would be like gazing at a photograph of a dead and almost long forgotten comrade, those are now his features, it is his face, and the days they spent together take on a mournful life in the memory, but the boy himself it surely is not no more. He felt sure he could never again take part in these same beings or to take part in the same scenes. It was not the failure to recognize their beauties, and their significance, but the ruin, all around, water, fire, and other devastations which cut him off from such joys and made the whole world incomprehensible to him — for then he had been forced to surrender himself to the horrid events, and was forced to be lost in them, and the least little thing was enough to carry him and his friends down the stream of hades.¹⁷²

For a moment we seem to be encountering a Henry Darger we have never seen, an adult Darger, surprisingly conscious of his life situation, unusually aware of himself. For once regression is held in abeyance; paradoxically, in Jack, we encounter a boy thinking a man's thoughts, though only for a moment. Henry was in his mid-thirties when this was written, and already his existence seems tormented and without hope, his outlook melancholy. "He seemed to be dead now and in a strange and horrid Purgatory." He understands that he is trapped, fixated, obsessed by memories of what once was. He realizes too that these memories are linked with desires, improper, impossible, unattainable desires.

Everything seems strong, his desires are strong — but they are always unattainable, and he knew it. And even if these scenes of his younger boyhood days were given back to him, he did not believe he would really know what to do or where to go.

And he tries to believe that these desires no longer exist.

Once he had had such desires, but they did not return now. They seemed to be all past, they seemed to him to belong to another world that is gone far from him. But here, out in the flood waters, they were completely lost to him. They arose no more ...

As with all denial, this is unmistakably fiction. Only in a moment of calm, out on the flood, can he maintain such a position, but all around him the fires are burning, the forests, the mountains are aflame. Even the rising waters, irrationally moving up and down in the course of a few hours, betray the stamp of libido.

The nature of these desires, the terrible power of which threatened to inundate and destroy him, will be examined in the chapters that follow. For the moment, it is enough to follow Jack's musings, his contemplation of time past, his memories of beauty and desire, his fear of being drawn irresistibly, inescapably into hell. But here the image in the water grows obscure. Darger hints at experiences occurring in childhood, experiences, or perhaps only feelings, of overwhelming intensity. One senses he is being deliberately less than candid, veiling sexual experience in metaphor, when he speaks of "The tender secret influence that passed from them into him and the other children." Something had been awakened in him, a terrible sense of beauty and longing. He tries to project his feelings onto all the other children.

Little girls and boys like these scouts surely long to be in them [these scenes of his younger boyhood days?] and to move in them, they longed to remember and to love them, and to be stirred by the sight of them.

But his grammar betrays the fact that it is he who longs, who loves, who is stirred by the sight of them. What is astonishing is the discovery that Darger is aware of so much, that he was, at least briefly, conscious of the extent to which he was trapped in childhood, bound to memories, experiences, feelings and desires, which he could find no way either to repeat, or to free himself from.¹⁷³

He felt sure he could never again take part in the same beings, or take part in the same scenes. It was not the failure to recognize the beauties, and the significance, but the ruin, all around, water, fire, and other devastations which cut him off from such joys and made the world incomprehensible to him ...

And suddenly, we find ourselves once more surrounded by devastation: fire and flood, adrift in a world in ruins. Darger describes the world after the flood. In his vision, there is no rainbow and no hope.

The face of the country was found to have been changed after the floods had receded. The neighboring woods and forests in the path of the flood presented a most singular scene ever known before, presenting a singular scene of wild confusion, the trees standing branchless and inclined in every direction, many without barks, and others with their trunks shattered and split in many places. The ground was in thousands of strange undulations like small waves of the sea, and on each side of the McHollester Run and McWhirther Run rivers the ground had been found to have swelled up through some mysterious convulsion, probably caused by the rushing pressure of the floods.¹⁷⁴

Looking out over the land destroyed, he lapses into melancholy, his song becomes a dirge for the end of the world.

It seems as if nature itself mourns over the great disaster created without her permission. Even the birds they say avoid flying over the dreary surface of the waters, and when a breeze stirs the waters of the silent sea, it sounds a funeral dirge and makes people feel as if this portion had been the end of the world. Nothing alive moves in the waters save the thick masses of debris which now and again flows back and forth nearest the shore or float lazily on the desolate lake.¹⁷⁵

The journey on the night sea is over.

Fire

The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

—The Second Letter of Peter¹⁷⁶

Fire smolders in a soul more surely than it does under ashes.

—Gaston Bachelard¹⁷⁷

I wanted to conquer this inferno and I firmly believed I was and am the only one who could really conquer it.

—Henry Darger¹⁷⁸

Darger's involvement with fire can be traced throughout his life. From boyhood on it became the vehicle both of his feelings of intense excitement (shared perhaps with his father), and of rage. The actual fires he set in childhood established an early and intimate physical connection with the devouring element: a sense of power in its manipulation, and an awareness of the tremendous danger represented by a loss of control. With the full emergence in adolescence of the disturbing mix of erotic and aggressive drives which characterized his sexuality for the remainder of his life, fire became the ideal embodiment of potential but suppressed sadistic violence. Arson always remained a possibility, with more controlled burning a mode of fantasy attack on the body.

It is, therefore, understandable that fire is overwhelmingly present as an aspect of the Unreal, with immense forest fires raging throughout *The Realms*. Nor should the accuracy and extent of Darger's imaginative penetration into natural catastrophes involving fire come as a surprise. Both in terms of written and pictorial expression he displays absolute mastery in the exploitation of fire. We know that he participated, as spectator, in several Chicago fires, and he filled scrapbooks with descriptions and photographs of more distant disasters cut from newspapers.¹⁷⁹ His imaginative grasp of the wide range of phenomena connected with forest fires, or what he often called "fire storms," is truly astonishing as it moves from detailed naturalism, through events of explosive grandeur, into hallucinatory anticipation of the cataclysmic destruction of the world. All of his senses are alert as he describes the response of the children to the approach of fire.

When the roar of the conflict seemed to increase in the far distance the atmosphere seemed to grow hazy ...

"Maybe its the fog of smoke from the battle." said Jennie.

"Yes, but the color of the haze is of a peculiar —" "It smells like smoke of burning wood," said Violet suddenly, "like burning wood and powder together."

"So it does," said general Evans, sniffing, "I wonder what is burning?" ...

"The battle has probably set the forest on fire in several places." said Angeline.

"I hope not." said Catherine.

"There has been reported that a furious fire was advancing toward us, that at least Evangelinia Crania and Norma Catherine are burning." said Hettie. "It may be these big fires." ...

"It is from the southwest. I can see a long faint sheet of carmine reflection." All turned to look in that direction and were indeed awed by what they saw. The sky was lighted up along the horizon of the far distant tree tops, and between them by a long streamer of ruddy light even to be too bright for a forest fire. It seemed still but nevertheless growing faintly brighter as it grew darker minute by minute.

Evans climbed one of the tallest trees and looked in the direction of one of the wooded hills covered with evergreen pines and hemlocks and was appalled at what he saw. A long sea of fire was moving straight toward the right rear of that great hill advancing in squares like the enemy during a charge. The fire was burning on top of the trees. He had never seen such a sea of fire in all his life. Mountains of various clouds of smoke were banked against the sky, clouds of various colors and pierced by flames rising swiftly into the air. Evans hastily realized that it was a large stretch of turpentine trees or forests that were burning and the conflagration was moving toward the pine forest, for the odor of pine and turpentine was in the air. He quickly descended to the ground all excited.

"We are in danger from a big sea of fire," said general Evans. "It is indeed advancing from the southwest."¹⁸⁰

As with all forms of natural disaster, Darger seems to need an element of mystery concerning the presence of the fires, despite the evident involvement of the Glandelinians. The forest fires are either deliberately set by the enemy, or are caused accidentally by the manmade events of battle. Less easily explained, however, is their strange tenacity. Despite the extreme rapidity of their approach, and the speed with which they leap from point to point, the fires persist for months, with ranges of hills continually alight. The flooded lowlands are perpetually illuminated by the all but eternal flames, the skies darkened by constantly renewed clouds of smoke. Darger's descriptions of the burning forests also seem to go on forever, yet are endlessly varied and always exciting.¹⁸¹ He delights in describing the explosive nature of fire, writing as it were from within the fire storm. Where could he have obtained such experience, such detailed knowledge of what it is like to be at the center of a fire storm?

A rain of red hot cinders was descending among his lines, or crashing into the icy stream with the hissing of multitudes of fire brands, while great sheets of flame rose from the distant forests of pine trees to a great height. It was at the same time dark and red as blood, the fire making an awful roar as it approached and a sea of fire rushing up a mountain side was seen to form into two huge wells of flame the biggest with its ensanguined tongues sweeping toward the valley of Ophelia Run threatening to consume towns and villages. Clouds of the blackest smoke hung over the advancing conflagration the glowing torrents of flame advancing nearer and nearer every moment, moving

forward with a hissing roar and burning toward Zimmermannians lines like the fire avalanches of hell ... Hot gases winds swept through the smoke filled woods not burning and at other spots in the forests turpentine trees catching fire would explode with a continual series of muffled roarings and detonations, while fiery clouds in the form of millions of sponges arose in front of one of the conflagrations, and above the whole retreating line of fire fighters the clouds hung like a stupendous pall and continued to spread mingled with sparks and embers carried by the wind storm.¹⁸²

In contrast to his graphic depictions of floods, which are both rare and relatively uninspired, Darger's pictures of burning forests and other kinds of catastrophe involving fire are visually spectacular, involving a wide range of symbolic connotations and emotional responses.¹⁸³ Occasionally a series of connected panels is used to depict a sequence of events: the approach of the fire, the children caught in the burning forest, and, finally, their escape, or rescue, from a situation of extreme peril. Scenes of approaching fire permitted Darger to contemplate vast skies in turmoil, exploring the contrast between the horizontal drift of natural clouds, and the furious upward thrust of boiling clouds of black smoke. A magnificent example is the watercolor *Pursued by forest fires, proving the bigness of the conflagration* (see illustration 6.6). The reflected illumination of the burning forests on the clouds above, and the strange effects of haze or obscuring smoke on the landscape below, obviously intrigued him, as did the tormented shapes assumed by super-heated smoke exploding into a variety of dramatic cloud forms. Through



8.20

Henry Darger

At Cedernine. Are again in danger from forest fires. Left panel of a two-panel composition. Collage-drawing. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

tracing, or even direct collage, he incorporated a wide range both of natural and surprising clouds, tinting them to suggest smoke and weird effects of colored light. His rising excitement is evident in the emphatic pencil shading which is used to suggest the movement and the density of heavy smoke. This picture is unusual in its systematic exploitation of a variety of deep tinted grays to construct both the cloud-filled sky and the dark hills below. Short vertical strokes are used to represent the trunks of trees in a vast forest, while the dark forms above are suggestive both of foliage-covered hills, and drifting masses of heavy smoke permeating the woods. Darger's fantasy is let loose in such scenes, as he searches for strange Rorschach forms and faces in the roiling darkness. He notes that his subject is "Cloud of Storm," informing us in his inscription that "It is 40 miles away and advancing fast." Clearly, the Vivian girls in the foreground, depicted in a state of tense expectation, have reason to flee.

Burning forests provided endless possibilities of unnatural, even bizarre, atmospheric effects, with smoke allowing for impossible, wildly expressive transformations of light and color described in hauntingly beautiful verbal constructs. Employing strange words and unheard of images, he invented an entire language for depicting the sky in its endlessly changing response to the fires raging below.

"Look at the great cloud, Gertrude." Mildred said. "It looks as if it were alive and appears like one of those typhoon clouds we have seen during those storms."

"Yes," Mildred, "it is very grand like an immense storm cloud, and there's no doubt about there being wind there, but the cloud I know from its appearance, is

black smoke. See along the lower horizon under the cloud. That's the fire glare." The great smoke cloud bank appeared indeed to be in constant motion. Its shape too was incessantly shifting and changing, now a great mass would roll upward, as clouds do in a gigantic volcanic eruption, either white and black mixed and sometimes yellow, cream, and brown, now sink down again, or wreath out in front and on top in False Cirrus appearance, now again the whole body above would seem to roll over and over on itself, then small portions would apparently break off from the mass and sail off by themselves, getting thinner and thinner and forming at last into sheeted streamers, while up along the whole under mass from the horizon rose countless shapes and immense rolls and convolutions and ball and globular formations. The smell of burning wood and pitch was in the air. Momentarily the whole of the heaving swelling mass rose higher and higher. It was very grand, but it was a terrible grandeur, it looked far worse than any typhoon cloud that Violet, and her sisters had ever seen.¹⁸⁴

Darger's detailed knowledge of the sky, in all seasons and in every type of weather, permitted him to create a wide range of believable atmospheric effects both in watercolor and in words. Even his more fantastic visions remain curiously convincing as he pushes out beyond the limits of mere naturalism, endeavoring to reach, as he himself says, "to the length of indescribability."

Although Darger reveled in the furious excitement of fire and its attendant phenomena, it was undoubtedly its symbolic implications, the burden of concealed meanings it carries, that led him to bring the children, and particularly his little girl heroines, into intimate contact with it. Of all the forms of natural disaster it is fire which threatens the children most directly, as they are lost in burning forests, or deliberately placed in harm's way by the Glandelinians. If it is not thrust upon them, they deliberately seek it out, desiring adventure even at the risk of their lives. Darger is recalling his own childhood response to the hypnotic effect of flames, as he describes Mildred's adventure in the forest.

"I guess I'll go back to camp," she said to herself, rising rather hurriedly and remounting her horse, and feeling a little nervous and uncomfortable, for she had known and heard how swiftly a forest fire often surprises a person, and the speed of their advance. And the air was getting hotter. She had not ridden more than a dozen rods, however, when she heard the roar of the tree tops again, mingled with that same rustling sound, only this time it sounded much nearer, and continued longer, and a great cloud of smoke passed by, followed by a hot parching squall. The little girl's heart began to beat fast with excitement.¹⁸⁵

The Vivian girls and their friends are in constant danger of being burned alive, with many of their adventures centering on fire. In numerous collage-drawings, they dance, like small flames themselves, fleeing from a roaring wall of flame. An example is the picture *At Cedernine. Are again in danger from forest fires*. Fire frees his pictorial images of

fixed boundaries, so that the brilliantly colored landscapes are possessed by irrational movement and instability. The fragmented earth appears to melt and flow, while the trees, reduced to blazing torches, bend and break. Pictures and text merge in the heat of passion (8.20).

Who could forget the scene presenting itself at this moment? All the seas of flame were moving in the strangest manner, as if they were in the central current of a terrific tempest, and the flames were so thick now, they obscured all the trees from view. Thousands of the largest trees of all were seen bending, when they would reveal themselves half burned through. Others suddenly snapped across and fell among the flaming seas below, with the upper part still standing but blazing with the rest. Sometimes the wind carried a mass of burning twigs and foliage that completely obscured the view like a thick rushing and soaring fire cloud.

Darger delights in having the children pursued by hungry flames, skipping just ahead of disaster. Everything is in movement, though invariably the children make it through the holocaust just in time. His writing moves as fast as they do, with the fire building to a roaring inferno in the space of a few lines.

At this moment a most terrific flare illuminated the open place before the church, as the distant flames broke more violently through a thick smoke cloud, and a stiff wind hot and parching was beginning to blow. There was the sound of another and most horrible explosion, more nearer, and over the town it began raining missiles and fragments of objects, and the

heat, and dense smoke, and fierce winds, gaining to cyclone violence as to rip roofs off buildings, forced Violet and her sisters to hastily vacate the town. Before the concussion of another explosion the walls of a building fell into the square and a number of houses crumpled suddenly sending up sheets of flame as they caught fire ...

Part of the forest on the right melted into fire. The light revealed a scene of horror. The hell was coming for their own observing post, at the speed of a mile a minute and making a hissing roar heard for miles, and the heat was terrific while a strong wind here made the trees roar and thunder, and tore big branches off by thousands. Violet and her sisters seeking for shelter were pelted by flying branches ... Ten minutes after the Vivian Girls had left the field of pine forests near the Garden Terrace they saw it flare into a sudden mountain of rolling stretching clouds of dazzling white hot flames. Had they been a minute later, they would have been goners ... It was the final death agony of the immense valley forest. As the heat grew greater and the fires nearer to their new refuge, Violet and her sisters hurried back down the road on their swift horses from the scene of carnage being pursued by the fire.¹⁸⁶

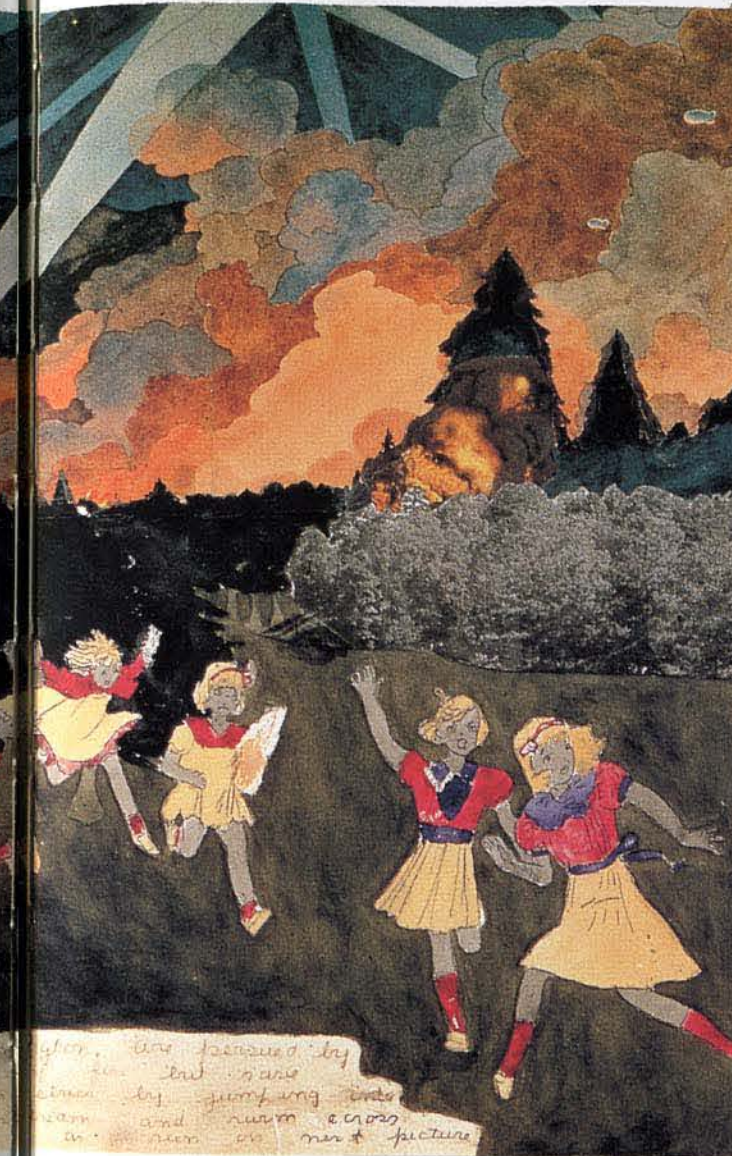
Not surprisingly, water occasionally provides a means of escape from the burning forests, with the children taking refuge in rivers or the flood. One of the most delightful of the collage-drawings depicting such an escape is the picture *At Torrington. They reach the river just in the nick of time*

(8.21). The extraordinary nature of Darger's imaginative penetration into the fiery situation, and the extent of his identification with his child heroines, is revealed by his unconventional use of color. The searing wall of yellow flame has reached the river bank, with the blackened trunks of trees and a narrow strip of shoreline all that remains in the midst of the inferno. Cut-out clouds are introduced at left, and additional fragments of collage are used to depict fiery branches sailing freely through the burning air. The shallow river, dyed the color of frothy pink lemonade, seems on the boil, as it reflects the fire-filled forest and the smoke-smudged sky. While we are told that the Vivian girls, have reached the river "just in the nick of time," the fact that much of their clothing has been burned away, and their bodies turned lobster red, would inevitably provide cause for concern were it not for the additional inscription provided by Darger which assures us that "Their red color is caused by glare of flames." The curious tendency of the flames to devour the little girls' dresses, leaving their bodies naked, but unharmed, hints at the nature of Darger's passion, and the real significance of fire.

Given Henry's childhood experiments with arson as a means of revenge, it is not surprising that the Vivian sisters occasionally use fire to turn the tables on their enemies. On several occasions in *The Realms* they set fires, indoors or out, distracting the Glandelinians with incendiary problems. A charming example of such an assault on invisible adults is seen in the collage-drawing *At Rossannahogan. Vivian girls are again chased by foe, but escape by setting tall grass on fire near the battle line* (8.22)

The Glandelinians, as we will see in chapter 11, are drawn to fire as a means of tormenting naked slave children. The tortures Darger invents on these occasions bear a striking resemblance to those used in the martyrdom of saints. On one such occasion, he mentions the fiery fate of Jean de Brebeuf at the hands of the Iroquois.¹⁸⁷ Adapted to his narrative purposes, the result is the collage-drawing *At Jennie Turmer. Children tied to trees in path of forest fires* (8.23). With his sadism stirred by tales of martyrdom by fire, he depicts the dangerous situation of twenty-one little girls tied naked to huge phallic tree trunks. Two of the children have literally been kidnapped, by cutting, from newspapers, and introduced into the forest by collage. With the fire only a few feet away, the children writhe like souls in hell, their only hope of salvation the imminent arrival of the Vivian girls. Having created this impossible, but delicious, situation, Darger reassures us, and himself: *In spite of exceeding extreme peril Vivian girls rescue them.*

Elsewhere, it is the Vivian girls themselves who are at risk of being burned alive. The elaborate title of another collage-drawing explains the situation: *They are captured, and placed in a burning house tied to some kind of pillars of wood. Two of them have freed themselves, and are about to loosen the ropes around her sisters* (8.24). The thought of children, particularly little girls, trapped in burning buildings obviously excited Darger. In part this was because he was preoccupied, from adolescence on, with fantasies of rescuing them himself. Later, he found pleasure in inventing situations from which there was no logical possibility of escape, and then allowing the Vivian girls, with the help of God, to find a way out. One of the most vivid descriptions of such an event occurs in volume thirteen, the



8.21

Henry Darger

At Sunbeam Creek. Are with little girl refugees again in peril from forest fires. but escape this also, but half naked and in burned rags / At Torrington. Are pursued by a storm of fire but

save themselves by jumping into a stream and swim across as seen in next picture / At Torrington. They reach the river just in the nick of time. Their red color is caused by the glare of flames

Three-panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on assembled paper. 19 x 70 1/2 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

8.22 opposite, left

Henry Darger

At Rossannahogan. Vivian girls are again chased by foe, but escape by setting tall grass on fire near the battle line, at Rossannahogan. Collage-drawing. 23 x 34 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

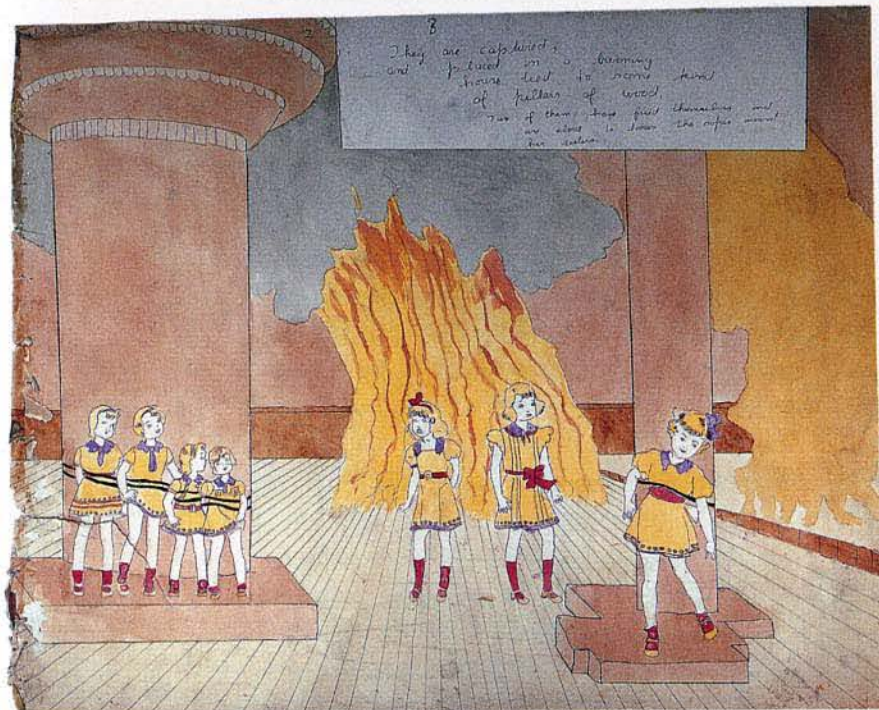


8.23 opposite, right

Henry Darger

At Jennie Turner. Children tied to trees in path of forest fires. In spite of exceeding extreme peril, Vivian girls rescue them. Left side of a two panel composition. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage, on pieced paper. 18 x 47 1/2 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.





8.24 left

Henry Darger

They are captured, and placed in a burning house tied to some kind of pillars of wood. Two of them have freed themselves, and are about to loosen the ropes around her sisters.

Collage-drawing.
17 x 24 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

final volume of *The Realms*. Darger's excitement and delight are evident as he participates, as author, in this hair-raising event. That he is having fun is revealed by his account of the various noises required to wake up his sleeping heroines.

But fortunately the loud crackling of the flames, the stifling smoke, and the noise of falling timber, and the shouts of people outside, and shouted orders from all firemen, and confusion of sound, besides the noise of engines, and firewhistles, awoke the little girls, and at once they jumped from their beds and rushed to the door.

In a moment they had jerked it open, but to their dismay singing sheets of flame fiarly blew in their faces, followed by black clouds of dense smoke. With difficulty they slam the door against the devouring flames and ran to the nearest windows about three of them.

"My God, how far are we from the ground?" gasped Jennie in horror.

"We are eighty feet," cried Violet. "At least it seems so, and no ladder can reach us for the men would face the flames of fire below. And there is no rope at hand with which we could lower ourselves at the other side. We will have to jump."

Overhead already great tongues of flame were breaking through the roof. Beneath them, leaping through the windows, came long tongues of fire, which were also rapidly consuming the walls. And already the house was starting to sway and tilt as if about to collapse.

"Oh God help us, we simply must jump down," cried Joice. "I will jump first dear sisters, and if it don't hurt me you must jump after me." Making the sign of the cross, she cried, "Holy Guardian Angel, help me." and she leaped to the ground fully thirty feet below. Wonderful indeed. She did not suffer the least harm, and as she rose quickly and called to her sister with a joyfulness that was indescribable, "Come on little sisters. It did not hurt me." She leaped among the throng. Imitating her sister's pious example, Jennie made the sign of the cross, and begged, "Holy Guardian Angel, help me." Another jump from the window. To the inexpressible joy of the weeping friends and anxious bystanders, the little one too rises without having sustained the slightest injury. Instantly her sisters followed, and just in time, for the house collapsed with a thunderous roar, sending clouds of sparks high into the air.¹⁸⁹

The spontaneous nature of his creative process is made evident, once again, by the curious fact that in mid-stream Darger realizes that he has gone too far — eighty feet in the air is an impossible distance for little girls to jump, even with the help of guardian angels! And so, in the space of a few lines, the distance is miraculously reduced to thirty feet, and the children descend without difficulty. "Wonderful indeed."

The Psychoanalysis of Fire

For everyone fire is imbued with unconscious and irrational implications, a burden of symbolic meaning derived from its unique character and from long human interaction with it.¹⁸⁹ That it carried particularly intense subjective implications for Darger from childhood on is more than evident. Issues of control, and of loss of control, found early expression both in his setting of fires, and in his illusory belief in his ability to manage them. At this early stage, what seemed to threaten him with loss of control was rage. During his boyhood there seems to have been a real danger of his acting out his unrecognized anger, using fire as a medium of symbolic expression. In adolescence, if not earlier, these aggressive drives were augmented by powerful libidinal sources of energy, giving birth to violent and compulsive sadistic impulses and fantasies which shaped Darger's sexuality for the remainder of his life.

Fire invariably embodies erotic meaning. Sexual desire is a passion which rages in the soul like fire and which, if not satisfied, is unquenchable. In a situation of near total inhibition and frustration, such as appears to have characterized Darger's life, it grows ever greater, attaining a level of irrational force which threatens the individual either with loss of control or incineration. All but unaware of the gentler aspects of fire, its ability to give light, to warm and console, Darger writes of wild fires which ultimately threaten to consume the world. His perpetual forest fires are fueled by inextinguishable desire, a potent admixture of aggression and eroticism. Not surprisingly, his flames seem almost to seek out child victims, specifically his chosen sexual objects, little girls.¹⁹⁰

We will explore Darger's preoccupation with fire as a means of assault on the body, and of inflicting pain or death, in chapter 11. For the present, our concern is with the fires devouring *The Realms*, the "red plague" which rages across the landscape, consuming cities, and reducing houses and their inhabitants to ashes. Despite the explosive character of his anger, and the undisguised sadism of his fantasies, it is unlikely that he had any insight into the symbolic function of fire in his life or in his psyche. Although he was driven to write of fire incessantly, there is no indication in his writings that he was aware that fire might support a burden of deeper or more personal meaning. The fires simply burn with ever greater urgency and vehemence, mounting higher and higher, and rapidly surpassing any possibility of human intervention or control. Too violent to be approached, they precluded understanding, or any attempt on the part of their creator to grasp their nature or function.

There is, however, an unusual picture which throws considerable light on Darger's incendiary visions, the dreamlike collage-drawing *At McCauls Run. Hands of Fire*¹⁹¹ (see illustration 6.10). The dreamlike scene seems to bring us into the bedroom of the Vivian girls, a dark, windowless space washed with deep grays suggestive of both night and smoke. Four beds are jammed together in chaotic disarray, as though they have been set in motion and are drifting about the room. Two little blonde girls in night dresses have been neatly tucked into each bed, with the exception of one bed whose sole occupant is fleeing from a terrifying apparition. The other Vivian sisters are wide awake, staring in fascination at the fearful hands of fire hovering over them. These enormous dis-

embodied hands are beautifully drawn to portray both menacing claws and flickering flames. Painted in luminous yellow, each hand is surrounded by a radiant aura of burning orange-red, suggestive of intense heat and light. And indeed, the room is illuminated by a dazzling light which mysteriously robs everything it touches of color, while causing the children's virginal beds to glow like hot coals. This amazing vision is, at once, immediately comprehensible and darkly obscure. What do these burning hands intend? Their presence in the bedroom of the little girls is no accident. Their grasping gesture, their incandescence, and their huge size readily convey monstrous desire: raging sexual hunger, and limitless violence, the object of which can be nothing other than the children's bodies. The explicit character of Darger's sadistic fantasies leave no doubt, in any case, concerning the nature of the desires embodied in these hands of fire. What the painting makes evident, through the impossible disparity between the fragile bodies of the children and the clumsy spectral hands (which would seek the little girls out, in their room, at night), is the fact that Darger's lust, grown monstrous, could find no realistic possibility of satisfaction, his rage no outlet other than murder. That the hands are not only disembodied, but severed, with blood seeping from the wrists to mingle with the watercolor wash, raises complex and compelling issues concerning the presence or absence of control, questions with which we will grapple in the following chapters. For the present, it is enough that we recognize the enormity of the psychological forces to be restrained, the savagery which would be the inevitable result of an even momentary loss of control. Darger knew of violence directed at children. Its sexual nature is implied by the blind firebird inserted in the upper right

corner, whose claw-hands these may be. It is possible that the hands of fire descending through the ceiling are intended to be an enlargement of the yellow claws seen on this menacing red bird.¹⁹²

But even nature seeks out small victims through fire and flood. The senseless destruction of the objects of his love filled Darger with rage, and that rage too found expression in fire.

The truth came to him. Why children as beautiful had perished by the thousands in the flood. This brought a blazing fire in his breast, a conflagration that easily got the best of him, a thing which he fought not; and when he thought of the forest fires ravaging the beautiful country in which such children just love to live in, a forest-fire raged within his breast. He clenched his fists and his eyes blazed with devilish anger.¹⁹³

Supernatural Fires

As the fires increase, naturalism is abandoned, with a strange subjectivity now determining their character and intensity. The human victims of fire move to center stage; their sufferings, their losses, become the focus of obsessional attention, and ever more extensive description. Fire serves a useful function too, with cremation used as a crucial method of disposing of the bodies which pile up as a result of the various natural disasters.

The flames seemed to sear the skies, and was so bright that no one could bear to gaze upon it. All the buildings were now catching on fire, and the heat was so intense that many of the fleeing persons were overcome and perished. On toward the other sections of the city swept that awful cloud of flames destroying everything in its path. And the shrieks, screams and howls of the multitudes that were being overwhelmed by this death hell was heart rending. The surrounding districts was as far as the eye could reach lighted up like a dazzling inferno, and the most monstrous seas of fire extended from block to block and the noise of the wind hitting the flames with the din of the dying persons was terrific. The flames even acted insanely. They jumped, they leaped, they soared toward the clouds. It was a hell pit of fire gone mad.¹⁹⁴

Darger's goal in speaking of fire is not so much science as epic poetry. Unnoticed, he has begun the descent into hell. His language changes as he reaches for images suggestive of cataclysm. Hanson Vivian, for example, lost in a sea of fire, voyaging through the inferno, pauses to contemplate the astonishing beauty of an igneous world gone mad.

All the hills within sight were on fire which lighted up the whole atmosphere far and wide. Yet the distant valleys were still quite dark and shrouded save in several places which appeared serpentine and irregular rivers of white hot flame from new raging fires. The light still illuminating the scene increased to ten fold brightness, then suddenly an unearthly luridness fell upon the air, and then came such an awful brightness, that Hanson and the rest literally shaded their eyes. And yet, with an increase of this awful brightness the well of flame rushed up the main line of ridges the most awful fire sea ever seen and over the broadest of the most monstrous shapes of flame there now seemed to spring cragged and stupendous arches as if it were of blood red hell fire, which as from the very jaws of hell itself, ascended sheets of dazzling flame seemingly a thousand feet or even more.

... Many times a wave of fire seemed forced into the air by the terrific collision with another from an opposing side, and was broken into masses of long roaring seething tongues, which the hurricane drove in sheets of fiery spray along the surface of the struggling fire eddies. And the furious waves of fire with the hot wind rushing into it, tossed in every direction,

and yet, at the same time, were forced forward by the irresistible pressure of the hurricane. The great clouds of smoke were wonderful. They seemed mounting to an indescribable height, and wreathed up like echalations from the craters of volcanoes, twisting themselves into fantastic shapes, that seemed to stretch forth arms to seize the refugees from the threatened towns, amid all the horrors of the fire flood.¹⁹⁵

It is as if Darger is struggling, straining through these irrational evocations of the fire storm, to reach a pitch of excitement never previously attained, using his now incandescent imagination to penetrate mysteriously into the very womb of the inferno. Hurricane and flames merge as the fire leaps from earth to sky, threatening the very heavens with destruction. In an unparalleled act of mythic invention, he envisions a cosmic struggle, a contest of leaping waves of fire colliding in a sky-borne, wind-tossed, sea of flames. "Sheets of fiery spray" are carried across the sky, mounting ever higher, until even the planets are at risk of incineration. Playing with symbolic fire, words tumble over each other, images appear and disappear like dancing tongues of flame, until orgasm appears both possible and necessary, an essential release in a world on fire.

This enormous fire grew rapidly, and where it spread mountains of smoke soared upward from it toward the sky in billows that seemed to try and reach the planets, in the sky far above the world. The conflagration assumed the form of an enormous wild fire ocean, and burned forward with incredible speed ... Bigger and bigger grew the fire sea, rushing forward

like a wild cyclone, a roaring rushing sea of flame. It is now a veritable sea of fire clouds, leaping hundreds of thousands of feet, and driven forward by an unusually strong gale evidently originating in the heat of so much fire. It was a most dreadful fire hurricane of enormous magnitude, beyond description horrible.¹⁹⁶

As he goes on, it becomes clear that he is describing Hell.

The flames of forest fires proceed as if from the breath of great infernal regions. The thunderous noises of battles, and great explosions, which the world still believes exaggerated, seem to be the demons trying to blow their way out of Hell, and create the shocks for their escape. Indeed, it seems to all who survive, that we are in perdition ourselves, and that the great clouds of unapproachable fire are vomited upon our forests from the innermost depths. The yelling Glandelinians are the demons, and the victims and refugees and others, the lost souls.¹⁹⁷

Writing at night, it is natural that Darger's drama is projected into the night sky. The vault of heaven, grown mysterious, seems to close in, drawn nearer to earth as it is filled with "strange peculiar weird lights." In the midst of the fire storm, the floods are summoned to serve as mirror to the heavens. As an artist he revels in the creation of impossible effects of color and movement in the black sky. The curiously fluid and insubstantial night Darger is describing, a vision bathed not only in the glow of the fires, but in blood, also found expression in pictures of *The Realms*. A truly demonic example is the collage-drawing *At*

Torrington. Are pursued by a storm of fire ... (see illustration 8.21). Making use of a large number of collage-fragments, cut almost entirely from black-and-white source material, Darger constructed a night landscape, a monochrome study in deep grays. While the darkened earth is thereby deprived of all color, the sky, which might have been purest black, is filled with a symphony of ravishing hues, all the colors of fire. Darger's genius as colorist is employed in creating a burning sky filled with luminous clouds tinted in a magnificently varied range of hot pinks, grayed salmon, red-oranges, violets, and brief flares of dazzling yellow. The deep blue night is also lit by unexplained moving beams of light, crisscrossing the sky with shining bands of transparent blue. Fire balls explode upward, while flickering vertical streams descend like the cool rays of the aurora borealis. It is evident that the artist is seeking effects of utter strangeness, tormenting his imaginary viewer with nightmarish celestial illusions seen only in terrifying dreams. To this spectacle one need only add sound.

The flames hissed and roared like a world of fire works and skyrockets going off at once mingled with the crackling of burning trees. Filling the air also with a curious piercing noise, and roaring like a tornado as the fire cloud moved, it was viewed in its terrific work on inconceivable destruction through the twilight darkness of that early September morning.¹⁹⁸

Through this explosive night, the Vivian girls, in a state of wild excitement, flee, "pursued by a storm of fire." Dressed in the colors of fire, they shine unnaturally in the darkness, inflaming the passions, like small firebrands fallen to earth from the burning sky.

Given the supernatural nature of the night and the fires, it is possible to question the nature of this inferno. Are these indeed the fires of hell, or of the final day?¹⁹⁹ Darger seems to wonder about this himself, imagining that the red glow illuminating the night stems from some other source, a mysterious light unconnected to the fires.

One night when in these two cities the raging floods was at its worse, a strange peculiar weird light appeared far in the southwest along the horizon, and this strange illumination had an appearance entirely unlike anything ever seen before, being in many hues at once, filled with glaring flashes like bombs bursting in a bewildering fury along the horizon, and with a fringe of blackness and red all above it and seemed to be in constant motion all along the sky for miles and miles ... It also had the appearance of a distant fire but it could not be for it appeared out of the path of a fire, and it was too bright to be even a volcanic eruption. This red and other colors of light became brighter and brighter hour by hour, and then suddenly died out altogether, leaving everything in the southeast in supernatural darkness.²⁰⁰

The World in Ashes

From volume to volume the fires continue to flare up, with ever renewed fire storms reflecting Darger's shifting, probably largely unconscious, internal states of arousal and rage. While remarkably tenacious, the flames eventually do go out or, at least, they appear to. In fact, they retreat into a kind of latency, to which he later gave the name "the Smoulder." They explode again in *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, and in *The History of My Life*.²⁰¹ It is evident that the suppressed passions symbolized by fire continued to burn within him throughout his life, kept under control only through enormous sacrifice, while at the same time fueling his alternate world.

Darger seems to understand that where the fires have burned or floods risen, nothing can ever be the same, there is no going back. His description of the world after the holocaust is both hauntingly beautiful and psychologically precise, reflecting quite exactly the reality of his own existence.

... the darkness would by degrees begin to pass away. The day would appear, the sun try to shine forth though very faintly as when an eclipse is coming on, but all nature seemed changed. Where forests lately stood is a sea of smoulder and gray over whitened ashes. The scene was changed, all was over, but the sea of ashes and smoke is there, the air is shimmering in the heat, and the beautiful forests are no more. In their places are apparently desolated plains of smouldering ashes with a smoking tree standing here or there, or with even no tree visible, nothing to be seen ... nothing but a great surface of white

ashes or gray, smoking and smouldering red ... Not even the wild flowers in all their loveliness and beauty can be seen to hide the hedious tragedy of the "red plague." Nothing, but miles upon miles of smouldering ashes, as if a world is burned out and dead.²⁰²

Still a relatively young man when these lines were written, Darger must have understood, on some level, that his outer life had been reduced to ashes, "as if a world is burned out and dead."²⁰³ Writing as historian, he documents the terrible destructive processes at work in his life, transforming his reality, through war and natural catastrophe, into *The Realms of the Unreal*. Writing of Calverinia, he describes all that this state has had to endure, while reminding us, yet again, that it is all a dream, not truth, but a work of art. And suddenly, he turns to us, his readers, with a question, an unexpected exclamation that reveals the extent to which he glories in his astonishing creation, with *The Realms*, like the phoenix, rising from the ashes to dazzle us with its beauty and power.

If it was a true one, no country in all the world would so completely portray that period of the past to us as does poor Calverinia, both east and west, overwhelmed by hedious floods, torn by battles, made harrowing by massacres of thousands of children, rent and shattered and torn gaping open by so many terrific explosions, and hidden in all its horrors for months and months by the smoke of forest fires that prevent sunshine even more than a thousand miles away from the state.

A Beautiful, Magnificent, satisfactory outcome of the war so far is it not?²⁰⁴

Coda

The cataclysmic vision of nature portrayed in *The Realms* was, in some sense, necessitated by the theme of war. On its own, mankind was not capable of violence and destructiveness on the grand scale needed for Darger's epic. It was, therefore, necessary that nature participate in the war, immensely magnifying the destructiveness of mankind by introducing that of God. As we have seen, the tremendously exaggerated violence of the earth in upheaval was required in order to provide a means of externalizing powerful forces within Darger's psyche for which he had no other outlet. Having presented this subjective vision of nature unleashed, and of the world in chaos, in four symphonic movements, it is necessary that we return now to a gentler view of the environment in this final coda to Darger's vast hymn to nature.

Behind all of Darger's descriptions of nature run wild one senses intense and prolonged observation of earth and sky, of atmospheric changes, shifting clouds, storms, perhaps even fire and flood. It is almost impossible for us to realize the extent of his involvement with the environment, the degree to which observation of the weather, on a daily basis, occupied a major portion of his experience in the outer world. A curiously intimate awareness of nature's changing moods replaced relationships with other people and, seemingly, a wide range of feelings and emotional responses. As we know, the weather formed almost his only topic of conversation. Having isolated himself from much of normal human experience, he betrays an astonishing involvement with these more material and

concrete aspects of the physical world. His obsessional interest in changing natural phenomena suggests a considerable displacement of libidinal energy in an area not usually associated with sexual and aggressive drives.

While his journals and the surviving "Weather Books" reflect a consuming interest in dramatic extremes of weather, there is a striking lack of response to nature in its more placid moods. It appears that the ability to tolerate violent extremes in the natural world reassured him somehow, providing evidence of masculine strength and endurance. One senses that he felt it necessary to be ready at all times to withstand overwhelmingly traumatic events, and he demands no less of his little girl heroines. The world he depicted in *The Realms* is a remarkably inappropriate place for children; indeed, much of the time the Unreal, as a physical environment, appears to be hostile to all human life.

It is, therefore, a matter of considerable interest when, on very rare occasion, Darger pauses to contemplate the beauty of nature, taking pleasure in the simple loveliness of the landscape: in flowers, clouds, sunlight, or the tranquility of night. It is almost as if the enjoyment of nature in a peaceful mood is a sign of weakness, something to be concealed. Yet the collage-drawings do reveal the presence of a man and artist deeply responsive to the more lyrical aspects of landscape, indeed to nature idealized. It is this gentler view of the natural world that distinguishes many of the drawings from the austere, often cruel vision of nature embodied in the writings. Clearly, the Realms of the Unreal are for the most part barren, a world tormented and in chaos. War has changed

everything. Nature has, seemingly in response to human conflict, grown monstrous as if reflecting human passions. In such a dark reality, a brief moment of peace stands in stark contrast to the chaos and evil all around.

There was probably no one in the world who ever had the opportunity to gaze upon such a grand and magnificent scene as which was spread out before the vision from the summit of Gautamula ridge that bright early June day, 1913. Wherever you could look, from front to rear, from left to right, the valleys stretched away in wide expanse of beautifully colored fields, and orchards, and groves, and forests. And the very air was laden with the perfumes of all various of spring flowers and of grasses, fresh pine and of fruits and with the incense of burning of dry dead leaves.

Far above one could see large fleecy clouds floating athwart the blue expanse of sky, intercepting here and there the bright sunshine, and mottling the very landscape with alternate patches of light and shadow which chased each other from field to field, across hillock and stream. And through this fine setting of scenery in Northern Angelinia state passed an unusually magnificent panorama. If one looked down from the heights he could observe something long and gray following like the long windings of a snake the meanderings of numerous roads, and thither to left and right up hill, and down dale, in sunshine and shadow, and this long line of gray, was tipped with shining steel, and threaded its way, a long serpent one reads of in fairy stories of old. Here

and there borne by a mounted orderly, a yellow guidon [guidon] inscribed with the familiar devices belonging to the general headquarters, spoke the presence of a supreme chief general and his staff of general and other officers, followed by their retainers.²⁰⁵

When could Darger have had the experience of standing high above a valley looking out across a vast space, observing the moving clouds and the shadows they cast upon the earth ("patches of light and shadow which chased each other from field to field")? Is he perhaps borrowing from a writer whose experience was less exclusively urban than his own? Certainly, the vision of a long line of soldiers on the move, winding through the landscape far below, must have originated in a mind and a world other than his own. Even he points to the imaginary world of fairy stories. Yet something in this lyrical vision has caught his attention, fulfilling a need in him for a calmer, gentler view of nature and war seen from afar.

In general, Darger associates the beauties of nature with the world of childhood, and with the time before the war. Early in their lives the Vivian sisters and their friends had known peace, and had lived in beautiful surroundings which reflected their parent's wealth and stature. More than this, the tranquility of nature reflects the spirit of the children, with sunlight and blue skies, flowers and gardens, expressive of their beauty and innocence. The collage-drawings, created long after the war in *The Realms* had come to an end, reflect this dreamlike vision of childhood, with the children usually depicted outdoors, often in garden-like landscapes filled with huge flowers, fruit trees of

previously unknown varieties, and the omnipresent palm trees set in the rolling hills of Illinois (8.25). Some of these pictures seem to reflect the world after the war has ended, with the Vivian sisters, other children, and even child-bodied Blengins now living in an environment more appropriate to little girls and boys. To a certain extent the illustrations to *The Realms*, with a number of very notable exceptions, reflect a more tranquil stage in Darger's existence, as though the writing of *The Realms*, and its sequel, or perhaps simply the passage of the years, had permitted him to attain a less tormented view of unreality. Or perhaps we are catching a glimpse of yet another unreality, a gentler alternate world reserved for children: a place of safety, a moment of respite, from harsh reality. Even in *The Realms* the children are granted occasional moments of peace in the midst of war.

The night was a beautiful one, and perfectly clear and warm. For a certain time for some unusual reason Violet and her sisters found it difficult to go to sleep and so they got up for a while and sat outside the tent, looking constantly at the stars far above them, and at the moon which was shining brightly overhead. They had never seen such splendor of the heavens before in their lives, and were awed as it seemed very unusual.

"Ain't the stars numerous tonight?" asked Jennie, "and is not the moon beautiful and bright? I believe it never looked so bright before."

"It certainly is," answered her sisters, "and the air is so clear and black. And the air is so beautiful and calm. I wonder what it can mean?"



8.25

Henry Darger

I see Glandellians, if they come here I'll — We will slam them with our wings. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper. 24 x 106 1/2 in. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase and gift. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

"It is hard to tell," said Violet, "I saw many a tranquil night but never like this. Maybe it is a spell of very fine weather which occurs so frequently in this part of Angelinia."²⁰⁶

Even in this moment of perfect calm, there is an element of tension. Perhaps it is simply Darger's wish to be there, with the children, in the night.

As they continually watched the scenery, they noticed the nearest bushes slowly wave aside and before them stood a tall man with a gun on his shoulder. He no doubt was one of the guards, but the little girls did not like to take chances, and demanded of him what he wanted.

"Oh, nothing," was the answer, "I heard your voices and came to see what was up. Why are you not sleeping? It is near ten o'clock."

"We do not know ourselves," said Catherine, "We could not get to sleep."

"Maybe it is the tranquility of the atmosphere," said the soldier. "I'm usually sleeping while on guard at some nights, but tonight I felt as if I could go without sleep forever. It's unusual."

At times Violet and her sisters could hear the drum drum explosion signals among the distant christian camps, and at other times the occasional challenge of a sentry, or the cry "All is well." They liked to listen to all of these sounds, and finally they began to feel drowsy and so they went in and retired for the night.²⁰⁷

This scene may provide an indication of the reason for Darger's avoidance of the gentler aspects of nature. Such relaxed and beautiful moments seem to have awakened disturbing sensual feelings in him, causing him to want to intrude like the soldier-guard into the world of the little girls. On this occasion "all was well," but normally such a scene would inspire the arrival of a Glandelinian spy, rather than a guard, and the children's tranquility would have been brought to a sudden and menacing conclusion.

Only in another and better world could the beauty of nature be enjoyed in safety. Perhaps it is this fact that causes Darger to picture landscapes surpassing anything that the world of his experience had to offer. Pushing the landscape out beyond mere naturalism, he arrives at yet another imaginary world, one that the Vivian girls seem to know well, that of paradise. Such a heavenly vision was permissible, even for Darger, belonging as it did to a world other than his own. With this romantic image of a dreamlike world to be shared by all, we find ourselves in familiar territory, not that of the Realms of the Unreal.

That evening an intensely golden sunset kindled the whole western horizon into one blaze of glory and made the waters of a large and beautiful lake near by like another sky. The lake being a part of the treacherous Angelinian seas lay in rosy or golden streaks saved where white winged vessels glided hither and thither like so many spirits and the little golden stars twinkled through the glow and looked down at themselves as they trembled in the water.

"Tom," said Violet, as a distant band struck up a hymn, "That lake looks like a sea of glass mingled with fire, which I have read of in the bible." True enough, like one to the lakes of the New Jerusalem up above the clouds, it did appear.

"I always fancy that I see it," said Violet. "The clouds look like great gates of peril pearl, and you can see beyond them — far far off its all gold."

"And once in my dream I have seen a band of bright spirits," said Angeline, "They came to me many times in my sleep, those spirits." And her eyes grew dreamy. All of a sudden she said, "I'm going there, I and my sisters when we die, though we don't know when"²⁰⁸ [8.26].

8.26
Henry Darger
PHENOMENON.
At Collis Junction.
Detail. Central panel
of a three-panel
collage-drawing.
Watercolor, pencil,
carbon, and collage
on paper. 18 x 70 in.
Collection of Sam
and Betsey Farber.
New York. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



9

THE ARONBURG MYSTERY

On a Saturday afternoon, April 8, 1911, a five-year-old girl, Elsie Paroubek, wandered away from her parents' home at 2320 South Albany Avenue in Chicago and disappeared.¹ "The little girl is described as having long curly golden hair, blue eyes and pink chubby cheeks, with a prominent dimple in each. At the time she disappeared she wore a red hat, a red dress, black stockings and high top black boots."² Shortly after her disappearance rumors began to circulate that she had been kidnapped by Gypsies. Kidnapping was, in the Chicago of those days, a rare event, and so stories about the missing little girl filled the city's

9.1
Photograph of Elsie
Paroubek, *Chicago
Daily News*, Tuesday,
May 9, 1911.



ELSIE PAROUBER.
(Girl whose body was found in the drainage canal
yesterday after long search.)
[Photo by Matousek, Chicago.]

newspapers. The sensational accounts catered to popular hostility toward Gypsies who, it was believed, regularly kidnapped small children. The pursuit of itinerant bands soon extended across three states. The Governor of Illinois, the Mayor of Chicago, and a variety of judges and politicians, involved themselves in the case, which had become a cause célèbre in the city and beyond. The police meanwhile, while raiding Gypsy camps and enjoying an unaccustomed feast of publicity, were quietly dragging drainage canals in the vicinity of the Paroubek home.

One month later, on May 7, 1911, Elsie's body was found in a sanitary district channel, near the screen guards of the powerhouse at Lockport, Illinois. At the inquest the following day the coroner and city physician at Lockport, Dr. E. A. Kingston, having completed an autopsy on the body, concluded, "There is no water in Elsie's lungs. She was not drowned. She was probably murdered before she was thrown into the water."³ The autopsy also revealed "blue marks on the throat as though the victim had been choked."⁴ The inquest and the funeral for little Elsie were covered by the press in great detail, but her tragic story was soon forgotten. Despite dramatic headlines ("Start Big Search For Girl's Slayer") and the posting of a \$1,000 reward by the Governor, the case remained unsolved. In spite of the coroner's findings, and the instructions of the jury at the inquest, the Chicago Police Department probably continued to assume that her drowning had been an accident.⁵ In any case, it is not the death of Elsie Paroubek that is of particular importance to us, but the loss of a photograph of her which had appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* on Tuesday, May 9, 1911 [9.1]. The loss of that picture initiated what came to be known in Darger's world as the "Aronburg mystery."⁶

AT SOME TIME in July of 1912 a photograph in Henry Darger's picture collection disappeared. "Picture of Annie Aronburg gone! Mysteriously missing."⁷ That there ever was a photograph of Annie Aronburg comes as something of a surprise, for Annie Aronburg is a fictional character in *The Realms of the Unreal*. Despite the fact that she is murdered very early in the story, Annie continues

to play a significant part throughout *The Realms*, making occasional dramatic appearances in the form of a ghostly "celestial child." Again and again we are reminded of her violent death at the hands of the evil Glandelinian general Raymond Richardson Federal.⁸

It was a shock to Violet and her sisters to hear that their little friend, Annie Aronburg, had been murdered by the Glandelinians. She had been one of their best little friends, she had done more for Violet and her sisters really than it would have taken five large volumes of a dictionary to tell, and had interceded for them on many an occasion. She had proved herself a daring rebel leader, and had brought her followers to more successes than any of her other officers had ever done. And now she was assassinated by the Glandelinian governor called Federal ... What had been his motive of assassinating a child in a cowardly fashion, a little girl no more older than nine years of age and whom he had never seen before? ... The whole of Calvernia had been shocked by the news of her assassination.⁹

The death of this child rebel leader early in the war becomes something of a rallying point for the Christian forces. Even the Glandelinians are puzzled by the intensity of the response to the death of this one little girl among the millions of slaughtered children. As one of their generals says:

That little rebel called Annie Aronburg who ten of our most worthy generals are responsible for in her death, must be a peculiar child. The Angelinians are infuriated at her assassination ... It is to this that I give the reason of the pugnacious character of the Angelinians.¹⁰

To Darger, however, it was not so much the death of Annie Aronburg, but the loss of her picture that became a matter of profound and terrible significance, one of the principal causes of his conflict with God, and a major factor motivating the great war that he documented in *The Realms*. The loss of the picture contributed to undermining his faith and unbalancing his mind, not only in *The Realms of the Unreal*, but perhaps in reality as well.

Given the fact that Annie Aronburg seems never to have been anything other than a fictional character, how are we to explain the loss of a photograph of her, in reality? More important, how can we account for the almost limitless significance of this lost picture to Henry Darger? The picture is said to have disappeared in July 1912. In other places he gives other dates for its loss, and as we will see, on at least one occasion he maintained that there were two pictures of her, both of which he lost. He was, however, quite specific about the source of the photograph, referring to "the loss of the picture of little Annie Aronburg taken from the Chicago Daily Noise Paper of May, June, or July, 1911."¹¹ Elsewhere, he was slightly more confused, suggesting it might have been 1911 or 1912. It was apparently this confusion about when exactly

the photograph appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* that made it difficult for him to obtain another copy of it. Not that he didn't try!

I could have the book of newspapers the picture was in, but without success. I could not trace it though I examined book after book. It was in some date of either June 1911 or 1912.¹² I and the little girl had been great friends and I longed for the picture as a memory of her.¹³

While Darger's research skills may have been somewhat limited, his faith in God was not. He believed, with absolute certainty, that prayer would bring about the return or rediscovery of the lost picture. He therefore began to pray for its return. "The longer I prayed for its return, the more the prayers seemed unanswered."¹⁴ The failure of his prayers, petitions, and a variety of other religious endeavors aimed at recovering the picture, as well as his mounting disappointment and anger, is recorded in a strange document known as the "Predictions and Threats."¹⁵

In part, a record of the progress of the war over a period of four years, from March 1912 to November 1916, the "Predictions and Threats" also contains prophecies about the future progress and outcome of the great conflict. Most important, it documents Darger's efforts to bring about the return of a number of lost objects through prayer and other religious activities, establishing direct links between the failure of these "petitions" and Christian losses in battle.

July, 1912 ... Great campaigns in Glandelinia going on. Christians meet serious resistance in every battle, and invasion is broken to pieces ... War seems in favor of enemy. Recovery of picture and the destruction of the murderers reported to be only thing or chance for christian success now.¹⁶

In evaluating this peculiar document it is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which it can be understood to record actual events occurring in Darger's life, as opposed to fantasy occurrences in *The Realms*. Each of the thirty-four "predictions" or "threats" involves a puzzling mix of fact and fantasy. At the heart of the document is Darger's anger over a series of losses and disappointments which seem to have troubled his existence between 1910, when *The Realms* began to be written, and 1916 when this list of accusations and threats was drawn up.¹⁷ The two main complaints concerned the loss, in 1910, of a manuscript containing an account of early events in the war; and the loss of the Aronburg picture in July of 1912. Each of the prophecies is dated, and each contains a specific threat concerning what will happen if Darger's prayer is not answered. The object of these threats appears to be God himself!

The main and terrible ferocity of the Glandco-Angelinian war started June 12, 1912, and is fearful in the unceasing battles. War progressed up to January, 1913, without any change, and it is blamed on account of the loss of the picture of little Annie Aronburg ... It is reported that in case of no return to owner, by March, 1916, the wicked Glandelinians will not be forced into submission, but shall progress better than before, whipping poor

christians to the bitter end. Petitions for the return of said picture was requested sometime in March, 1915.¹⁸

Darger, enraged at losses and failures occurring in his real life, is threatening God with revenge in the form of losses and failures in the imaginary world of *The Realms*. The implications are that millions of innocent men, women, and children will die if the Aronburg photograph is not returned. The threats concern specific battles.

Christians repulsed and roughly handled at Vivian Wickey, but victorious at Sunbeam Creek. Lull in war does not help christian nations. Aronburg picture must be found before the end of March or all will be lost.¹⁹

Clearly, Darger's relations with God, and his church, had reached a breaking point.²⁰

THE NATURE of this catastrophic confrontation will be explored in chapter 12. For the present, our concern is with Darger's obsessional involvement with a lost picture, and the inappropriate, indeed monstrous, threats issued in connection with it.²¹ While some of these predictions concern purely imaginary occurrences, I believe a series of real events underlay Darger's evident disturbance. Chief among these was the actual loss of a picture. That the border between reality and fantasy in Darger appears vague to us may result from the fact that it was even less evident to Darger himself. The "Predictions and Threats" reveal a profoundly confused individual, increasingly unable to distinguish between fantasy and fact; leaving his church and joining the Glandelinian army; furious at a real God (in whom he so obviously believed); and issuing threats against Him which he can carry out only in an imaginary world.

Darger seems to have understood that his obsessional involvement with the lost picture, and its supposed link with the war occurring in *The Realms* was, to say the least, strange. Just how strange is made evident through the opinions of other characters in the story. General Baldwin is speaking:

"Late this morning before the battle began today a soldier came to me and told me there was a man who lost a picture of the Aronburg child whose name was Annie Aronburg. The picture was not exactly lost, but stolen on him with a lot of other pictures of children, or burned or something. He claims that this battle, which extended fifty miles along the Conservatory Run, will never be won unless it is recovered. So now we are facing disaster and it makes me inclined to think that his surmise is true, for through Viviania and the others, I know a man who really did lose such a picture, and since he did we never had luck since."

General Hanson looked surprised. "Who is this man?" he asked.

"General Henry Joseph Darger or something," answered Baldwin. "He claims that the loss is responsible for the calamity. He is a general in Wienstien's army."

"Oh bosh," said general Hanson disgustedly. "The man must be a nut for how could the loss of a picture be responsible for the disaster? Pictures don't cause terrific battles like this. And her murder is not responsible for these disasters either."

"That is what I told him" answered Baldwin, "but he only got sore. He told me he lost the picture an hour before the war

started. He told me he admired the picture very much, having left it with other pictures of children in some small book and all the pictures with it disappeared. Then an hour afterwards came the outbreak of the rebellion." Baldwin finished the sentence with a grin.

"A likely story," he said. "I would like to get hold of this man who poses as our great Geminian general Darger. Where is he now do you know? Was he hurt too? I kind of feel after all that his statements show him to be a maniac of the queerest kind ... Did he say the pictures were lost or stolen?"

"No, he says a Glandelinian general by the name of Raymond Richardson Federal took them while he was away from his home, and burned them in a furnace. He says he has proof."

"It may be a positive fact that he lost the pictures, but it is all nonsense about their causing the disaster," said Hanson. "There are rumors that the murder of the child is affecting us queerly, but the pictures are nothing."²²

The Photograph in the *Chicago Daily News*

In attempting to ascertain the limits of Darger's involvement with the real world, an early student of the Darger manuscripts, Michael Bonesteel, turned to the *Chicago Daily News*, for the months of May, June, and July 1911 and 1912. Was there, in fact, a picture of a murdered child? While today such an inquiry would be senseless, yielding dozens of pictures of children murdered during a period of six months, Bonesteel's quest produced only one candidate: the picture of the murdered Elsie Paroubek, and a story concerning this missing little girl, which had dominated the news for over a month.²³

Darger read this newspaper regularly. He would have been keenly aware of the disappearance of little Elsie. Given his interest in lost children, it seems probable that he would have followed the reports on the search for the missing child, as they appeared, all through the month of April and into May 1911. He certainly saw the photograph of the extraordinarily pretty little girl published in the May 9, 1911, issue, which announced the discovery of her body, the results of the inquest, and the finding that she had been murdered. Given his reasonably specific indication of where the missing picture was obtained, it seems very likely that the picture that he lost was that of Elsie Paroubek, renamed by him Annie Aronburg.

Bonesteel pushed his speculation concerning the link between Elsie Paroubek and Annie Aronburg a step further, demonstrating what was involved in transforming the name Paroubek into Aronburg — the substitution of three consonants. Five letters,

and the use of three syllables, are common to both names.²⁴ What he neglected to explain is why Darger would have carried out such a complex operation, in moving from the real little girl, Elsie Paroubek, age five, to the imaginary child rebel, Annie Aronburg, age ten. That Darger knew the real name of the murdered Paroubek child is easily demonstrated. This relatively rare Bohemian family name appears several times in *The Realms*, as a placename, and as the name of a battle.²⁵ It also appears twice on maps which he drew depicting the territory of *The Realms of the Unreal* (see illustration 8.5). It seems probable, therefore, that his use of the fictional pseudonym Aronburg was a deliberate and calculated transformation, connected with the move from reality into the unreal.

Far more difficult to explain is why the loss of the photograph of Paroubek/Aronburg should have assumed such overwhelming importance in Darger's life and in *The Realms*. I would like to suggest that the photograph only became significant because it was lost. Similarly, it was not so much the death of Elsie Paroubek that attracted his attention, but the long period during which she was missing: her disappearance from home, and the search for a lost little girl. It was this situation of uncertainty which aroused his intense feelings in regard to every lost child. It was the issue of "loss" that was of overriding importance to Henry.²⁶

The loss of the photograph masks another loss, the third figure in a triangle of lost children: his sister, the little girl who he never saw, whose name he never knew. Given up for adoption soon after her birth, she was the real lost little girl who troubled his imagination throughout his life. Precisely because she was still alive, both in reality and in his imagination, she possessed a continuing ability to haunt his dreams, as a disturbingly ideal celestial child to whom he responded with intense ambivalence, and probably much of the time with repression. In that Henry had never seen her, and knew nothing at all about her, not even her name, if she existed at all for him it could only have been as a figure in his imagination. She could be any little girl, possess any name. Her only identifying characteristic was that she was "lost."²⁷ I believe that for a short period in 1911, when Darger was only nineteen years old, Elsie Paroubek functioned briefly as a symbolic substitute for his lost sister. That she was murdered, strangled, is also not without significance, as we will see. His obsession with the dead Annie Aronburg and her lost picture was also powered by this real loss, though probably without Darger's being aware of the connection. The irrational hold of this fictional little girl on his imagination is explained by his complete lack of awareness of the connection to his lost sister. Only in this way can we understand his terrible longing for a photograph of the missing little girl. "I longed for the picture as a memory of her."²⁸

The intensity of his longing for this lost little girl, renamed Annie Aronburg, resulted in a bizarre, indeed pathological process of identification with her. Allowed to enter into his personal mythology, stirring unconscious forces deep within him, she became part of a powerful complex to which he gave the name, the "Aronburg mystery."

The image of the murdered child haunts *The Realms* in strange ways, which suggest that its importance extends beyond Darger and his obsessions.²⁹ For example, in the midst of a battle between the Glandelinians and the Angelinians, her picture suddenly appears, "writ large" as it were, on the side of a barn. The psychic split in Darger himself here finds expression in the persons of the two contending generals, Dargin and Darger.

In the midst of the battle field was a large barn which had a large picture of the Aronburg child pictured or painted on the outside, and which was the headquarters of general Dargin the Glandelinian butcher. Against these gray wedges Darger threw his forces ... A shell blew up a part of the barn to pieces and Dargin was severely wounded by the fragments. The picture was unharmed ... Darger went into action with eight hundred thousand men and lost nearly one hundred thousand. Beaten several times as he was, Darger tried a general assault being bound to capture the picture at all cost.

9.2

Henry Darger

Angelinia Aronburg.
Modified oval photograph.
©1998 Kiyoko
Lerner.



Little Annie Aronburg

Although the death of Annie Aronburg is mentioned many times in *The Realms*, we learn relatively little about her prior to the moment of her assassination. She was alive during the early part of the war, and a leader in the child-slave uprising which began in the fall of 1911.³⁰ Jack Evans, who also participated in the rebellion, describes her:

I in person knew Anna Aronburg ... She was my main assistant in the plot, and she arranged everything so nicely that soon there was the most peculiar rebellion going on that the world ever heard of.³¹

Annie was a niece of the great Christian general Concentinian Aronburg, leader of "the most glorious Angelinian army in the world."³² His importance, as one of the major military commanders of the Christian forces, increases from volume to volume, culminating toward the end of the story in his appointment as general in chief of the increasingly victorious armies.³³ He then finds himself opposed by the evil general Raymond Richardson Federal, chief commander of the besieging armies of Glandelinia, and the murderer of his niece.

A Valiant Girl Scout: Angelinia Aronburg

In a very real sense, Annie Aronburg is replaced in *The Realms* by her sister, Angelinia Aronburg, age twelve, who is known to her friends as Gertrude Angeline.³⁴ Next to the Vivian girls themselves, Angelinia is the most prominent girl leader, head of the girl scouts, and a brilliant and dangerous adversary of the Glandelinians. In many chapters of *The Realms*, the Vivian sisters are forgotten as we follow the adventures of Angelinia Aronburg and her girl scout friends. In one of the lists which Darger used to keep track of relationships in *The Realms*, he mentions that Gertrude Angeline is an adopted sister of the Vivian girls, the eighth member of the group of seven. She is easily confused with them in pictures, because like them she has blond hair. She also looked a good deal like her murdered sister Annie (9.2).³⁵

Gertrude Angeline was a wonderful girl despite her age and form and beauty. Not so very tall for her age only twelve and her hair was of a shining golden color. Her eyes had a gentler look than even those of her two companions and were pale blue in color and her face was round and bronzed. Gertrude Angeline always wore a red or dark pink ribbon on the left side of her head and sometimes on the right ... Gertrude has a fine character too, for she never grumbles no matter what she suffers or has to undergo ... It never mattered where she was or what she was doing, the girl seemed always content in being able to do her duty, and having good companions to share her scouting parties, her wanderings, and her adventures.³⁶

Gertrude Angeline's devotion to the Christian cause, and her intense dislike of Glandelinians, is a response to the murder of her sister Annie. The two sisters had fought together for a time at the beginning of the child-slave rebellion, and she is very clear about the reason for her sister's death.

"The Glandelinians hated little Annie Aronburg because they knew she was the little rebel who planned the whole child slave rebellion and who, with you her sister Gertrude Angeline, carried it through to such success just before she was murdered."

"No, that is only an excuse," said Gertrude Angeline, "The Glandelinian slave masters were really terribly afraid of us, our patriotism to God and all his creatures in heaven. Glandelinia hearing of our rebellion planned to crush us rebels before we became too strong, and that is the reason they assassinated my sister."³⁷

The Vivian Sisters and the Aronburg Mystery

Through their close relationship with Angelina Aronburg the Vivian girls are made acutely aware of the curious connection between the Aronburg mystery and the course of the war. However, despite their unusual intelligence they don't appear to possess any special insight into this puzzling situation and, throughout the story, they remain as mystified as we are concerning the Aronburg mystery. Although they are well aware of the extraordinary violence characteristic of Glandelinian attacks on children, they remain

strangely perplexed by the murder of their little friend Annie Aronburg, unsure both of who did it, and why. Returning to the question again and again, they grapple with the incomprehensible issue of her death, lingering compulsively on the violent details. It is clear that to them the death of this one child is somehow special, just as the disappearance of one child, his sister, was special to Henry.

All this time Violet and her sisters had kept on wondering whose hand it was that had drove the cruel sabre or knife or sent it tearing its cruel way through the heart and body of pretty little Annie Aronburg, on the eve of what was to have been the most joyous success of her life during the child slave rebellion? What Glandelinian could have nursed a hate and anger so bitter that it could only be satisfied with the murder of the brave little girl who was about to become one of the best child leaders ever known?

And indeed what was the reason for this wicked overpowering hate of the Angelinian child, a hate that reached its wicked climax while that year the Christmas bells were ringing out their message of peace and good will? Was it the intention of luring the Angelinians into war, greed, fear, or exposure, or some entirely different motive that impelled the mysterious assassin, to steal into her home, and relentlessly cut her down?

Violet and her sisters also had a foreboding that in some way if such a thing was really true as believed, that the Aronburg situation hung heavier over them, than it did over the Angelinian nation.³⁸

Although the Vivian sisters and other characters in *The Realms* refer to the Aronburg mystery, no one really appears to know of what the mystery consists. Jack Evans, for example, "did his best to discover where the real part of the mystery came from. He was also rendered desperate about the situation of all the christian armies, and wondered what could be done to change the states of affairs."³⁹ It is not so much the murder of this little girl which is a mystery, as the unexplained link between her death and the disastrous course of the war. More puzzling still is the paradoxical connection between Darger's loss of a photograph of a murdered child, and the inability of the Christian armies to triumph over the Glandelinians. This illogical link confuses everyone. While it seems that justice must be done, no one is quite sure whether it is the punishment of the murderers, or the return of the lost photograph to Darger, which might correct this confusing flaw in the unreality which is *The Realms*. Even in the final volume the children are still struggling to understand, with Gertrude Angeline as puzzled as anyone over the mysterious implications of her sister's death. Joice Vivian is speaking:

"... But we can hope that soon the siege will be raised by us, and then we can look for the ending of this horrible war. For my part I'm tired of it. It has lasted too long, and we believe it would never end."

"... But it is strange about that Aronburg Mystery. It has not even been solved yet, and there was a report that if it could not be solved the war would be lost, and look where we are now." said Gertrude Angeline.

"Yes, it was funny," said Jennie, turning suddenly upon her ... But then I think that was all humbug. How could the murder of a little girl cause the christian forces to loose the war. It seems a crazy thing to hear about it too."⁴⁰

In a real sense, Darger himself was confused. Aware that a good story should contain a mystery, he created one which finally he could neither understand nor resolve. Ultimately he sought compensation for the loss of an unnamed little girl, and punishment for those amorphous and constantly shifting adults responsible for her death. His confusion is reflected in that of the Vivian girls.

"But what in the name of heaven is the situation really about?" asked Catherine. "What is the mystery of the Aronburg situation anyway?"

"No one can solve the mystery and probably never will. It's about as hard to solve as the Divinity as it seems," answered Evans. "But, whatever it is it is causing disaster upon disaster, and only the destruction of her other assassins can bring it to a stop. Only then can we expect absolute success. We got to destroy those wicked Tamerlines some way, and capture and punish that General Aronburg Raymond Federal who was her main assassin."⁴¹

The Third Aronburg Sister

One of the most intriguing male characters in *The Realms* is Penrod's friend James Radcliffe, the Rattlesnake Boy. Having participated in the adventures of these two plucky chaps for many volumes, it comes as rather a disturbing shock when rumors begin to surface about the Rattlesnake Boy, suggesting that he is, in fact, a girl in disguise. We are still more surprised when we finally discover that he is yet another sister of Angelinia Aronburg, known as Anna, not to be confused with the murdered Annie. Anna's unconventional response to the murder of her sister, in the form of a temporary change of gender, while unexpected, makes eminent psychological sense. Radcliffe delights in fooling everyone, even his own sister. "So Angelinia Aronburg knows or suspects I'm a girl in disguise. Well wait later, and she'll have a great surprise. Too bad I can't spring it on her now. I'm her sister indeed, Anna Aronburg."⁴²

Clues in Snider's Barn

The murder of Annie Aronburg haunts *The Realms*, indeed it is re-enacted over and over again. It seems to make no difference that each description of her death differs from all others — that is merely part of the mystery. The Vivian girls don't seem to be disturbed by the endless contradictions, as they set out, again and again, to solve the mystery of her murder. Toward the end of *The Realms* the scene shifts to Snider's Barn.

Violet and her sisters ... went back to Snieders barn from which they had fled at Tamerlines approach. They were bound with the help of Starring to solve the

mystery of the little Annie Aronburg murder and for a week they had spent their time examining every contents of the barn studying every picture of the children carefully and even listening to the songs on the ponograph with delight.⁴³

"If only her picture was here we could do something," said Violet. "The pictures here are all of children who led in the child labor rebellion but she is not among them."

"And yet she had been one of the main leaders," said Starring ...

"Suppose her spirit would come," advised Angeline, "You remember sisters we saw her once but then she would not break the secret of the mystery not even to us."⁴⁴

Darger is writing a murder mystery at this point, providing us with plenty of clues, while withholding the essential information. Events unfold rapidly, with only enough delay to maintain suspense.

"I wonder what is in that safe like box in the other room?" said Jennie. "I've been prying and trying to break it open for the last half hour but the door won't budge an inch."

"Smash the door open," said Violet eagerly. "It must contain the secrets I'm sure." Starring himself at last managed to get it open, though it took a lot of work to smash the door from the hinges.

"I don't see why it was locked so securely for when there is nothing in it," said Starring with a laugh.

"That's funny," said Joice, "I thought there were great values inside when it was so securely fastened."

"I see it has an inside door," said Catherine.

Henry Darger

After the Battle of Drowsabella Maxilian. Vivian Girls find articles which they believe relate to the Aronburg mistery — smashed safe like box open and find box of moulded paper, three bloody knives, queer shaped pistol — and picture of child whose body has been slashed wide open with all the intestines exposed to view. Starring destroyed the picture. Left panel of a three-panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon, and collage on paper. 48.1 x 178.1 cm. Gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner. 1980.102R, The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



"Maybe there is something beyond that," said Hettie. "It looks like a box." Starring noticed this at the same time she did, and after hard work managed to pry it open. The contents were amazing. There was a box of moulded paper inside, three bloody knives, a gun, and a picture of some child victim whose body had been slashed wide open with all the intestines exposed to view.⁴⁵

This momentous event is portrayed in a collage-drawing whose tantalizing title seems to offer, and then withhold, the missing picture (9.3): *After the Battle of Drowsabella Maxillian. Vivian girls find articles which they believe relate to the Aronburg mystery — smashed safe like box open and find box of moulded paper, three bloody knives, queer shaped pistol — and pictures of child whose body has been slashed open with all the intestines exposed to view. Starring destroyed the picture.*

Despite the lugubrious nature of the turquoise room, with its dark paintings and midnight-black window, the seven Vivian sisters seem decidedly cheerful as they study the evidence. The small boy in a purple snowsuit and hood may be presumed to be Walter Starring. He alone appears upset, disturbed no doubt by the content of the picture which he holds. His expression may help to account for the disturbing information that "Starring destroyed the picture." While the horrifying representation of a disemboweled child was undoubtedly intended as a depiction of the murdered Annie Aronburg, it should probably not be equated with the missing photograph. The contents of the opened safe are clearly visible, including the box of "moulded papers" (Darger's missing manuscripts?), three blood-stained knives, and a gun; but Darger offers no proof that these articles are

linked to the murder of Annie Aronburg. Nor are we told whose room or whose safe this is. But, in this familiar room, which like the murder itself seems to shift from one location to another, we seem to be close to the heart of the mystery. It begins to appear that the death of Annie Aronburg may have occurred in this place. But who was the murderer?

A possible answer turns up in a peculiar place: in Henry's room in Chicago, in a handwritten note inserted, totally without context, in his "Reference Ledger." Printing in heavy script, he wrote: "THREE BLOODY KNIVES, GUN WITH RRF ENGRAVED UPON THEM." These clues later appear in Snider's Barn, supporting the idea that the murder occurred there.

"We have indeed found some clues. Maybe she resided here during the rebellion which was going on also in this vicinity," said Daisy. "This barn must have been her headquarters."

"There are sure signs enough that she was murdered here," said Angeline pointing to a corner where a pile of clothes covered with dried blood lay. "These surely were some of her clothes. It is funny we didn't notice them before."

"And these weapons no doubt belonged to the murderer," said Starring, "The letters R.R.F. is engraved on them."

Even an inexperienced sleuth, and the Vivian girls are far from inexperienced, would recognize these initials as those of Raymond Richardson Federal, thus confirming his suspected connection with the murder of the Aronburg child.

An Account of the Murder of Annie Aronburg

Toward the end of *The Realms*, Darger reveals an astonishing fact — he was present at the murder of Annie Aronburg! This sensational revelation is made during a tense conversation with the Christian General Viviania, who seems to have grasped the fact that there is a mysterious link between the missing picture of Annie Aronburg and the war with Glandelinia. He decides to confront Darger, to determine whether something can't be done.

"This is all on account of that Darger and his old picture," he said bitterly. "I wonder how it could be recovered?" He went at once to general Darger's headquarters and requested him to make out some means for the recovery of the picture. "How am I going to recover it, your excellency?" said general Darger sadly. "I have tried various means, invading the Glandelinian Public Libraries, and so on, but without success. As it is fair in war I would have seized the book of newspapers the picture was in, but I could not trace it though I examined book after book. It was in some date of either June 1911 or 1912."⁴⁶

And now, for the first time, we learn of the existence of a second picture of the murdered child, a picture removed from her body immediately after the murder. We also obtain firsthand information about the identity of the child's killer.

"June 1911 or 1912," said general Viviania sharply and with ardent suspicion, "I thought you received the picture from her waist?" "I did, but I lost it. I had received another in a newspaper that told of the tragedy, which was also stolen with

many others I had. General Phelan an Angelinian traitor had something to do with the murder and feared that I would expose him, so no doubt he stole the picture so no evidence could be made against him."

"Ahem, a traitor, hey? Well, I'll be bound. He must be captured at all costs. What Glandelinian army is he in?"

"A division of Raymond Richardson Federal's army, your excellency. He goes under the name of Tamerlinieia, but that is not his name at all. He is one of the worst men, next to Thomas and Raymond Richardson Federal."⁴⁷

The observation that General Phelan is somehow connected to the murder, and that he is also responsible for the theft of the picture of the Aronburg child, is of particular interest in that, although it is made in the context of the story, it leads back to Darger's life at St. Joseph's Hospital, and to the actual Thomas Phelan who roomed with him there. It was Thomas Phelan who Darger accused, in reality, of throwing out parts of his early writings and various pictures of little girls. His enmity toward Phelan now finds expression in the accusation that, as General Phelan and a convert to the Glandelinian cause, he was the actual assassin of Annie Aronburg.

"Could you describe the murder?" "Yes, your excellency. I was then a Glandelinian child labor boss but much against my will as I was compelled. Federal governed all the slave houses in Calverinia and Phelan was his mayor. When the Child Labor Revolution broke out this little girl was elected a leader by the child rebels and by her gallantry she made rapid progress which enraged Phelan who got permission

from Federal to murder her in cold blood. I was the witness to the most blood-curdling crime ever committed in Calverinia.

"Annie Aronburg habited in her nighties, had been probably occupying her mind for some time by planning for victory, when the brute seized her by the hair which was loose and flourishing a razor about her face ... instantly he began to choke her, tearing her nightie to tatters, then with one determined sweep of his muscular arm he nearly severed her chest open with his razor ...

"I had tried my best to stop him but a struggle with such a furious giant was useless and he got away after trying to shoot me down. I called the police, secured the picture for a special use, and went off to report the deed to Calverinian christian committees. Not long after that I lost both pictures one after the other ... I and the little girl had been great friends, and I longed for the picture as a memory of her."⁴⁸

General Viviania then asks what is the fundamental question:

"How then is it that the loss of the photographs of the plain picture is responsible for the situation of this war?" asked general Viviania, rather hotly.

"That is a mystery, your excellency, even to me ..."

"Are you a christian or just serving in my army for revenge?" "I'm a perfect Angelinian and nothing else and have no love for the enemy of my country." answered Darger. "I belong to St. Anthony Parish."

"Do you pray for the discovery of the stolen picture?"

"I have offered a petition for its return ... I have only done this last March, however ..." Saluting, general Darger withdrew with a better hope than he had ever had before.⁴⁹

Darger's hope of finding the missing photograph continues to trouble *The Realms*. From time to time he holds out the possibility of its continuing existence, awakening in the Vivian girls, and in the reader, the expectation that it may be recovered and returned. Walter Starring, for example, claims to have seen the picture in the possession of General Tamerline.

"Have you heard general Darger's story about this?" asked Joice. "He claims that his loss of the picture of the child is the cause of our threatening defeat during this great battle."

"It is true" said Starring. "Kill the general by the name of Tamerline, and he will have the picture as the Glandelinian leader has it in his possession."

"You don't say," said Violet. "Since when?"

"He stole it from Darger. I saw him do it, and I saw it in his possession before this battle started, while he was jokingly showing it to his general staff and insulting it."

"We must tell this to Darger and general Viviania," said Jennie. "This is important information indeed. This is a sign that God through St. Anthony will soon restore it to him. I hope he does so soon so that Manley don't make any such wholesale successes as he has been doing this battle."⁵⁰

ONE OF THE MOST delightful sightings of what may have been the missing photograph occurs in the final volume of *The Realms*. Jack Evans, out on a spying expedition, stumbles upon a house in a remote area. What makes this discovery particularly moving is that, all unknowing, Evans appears to have found his way to Henry Darger's room on Webster Street.

General Evans decided to go out on a reconnoitering tour and see what he could learn about the strange Glandelinian army ... He rode on to a certain glen, in the middle of which stood a small house. Next to the small house, or what appeared to be a barn, was a large and stately mansion, and as the house looked suspicious to him, Evans decided to examine it. He crept up close to the building, and looked in one of the [windows]. He was startled and surprised at what he saw. In the room was a large and handsome round table, the room itself being of great size. The table was covered with big books, and papers, and the room was filled with all kinds of rubbish, while hanging on the walls were the same kind of child pictures that the Vivian girls had in their possession. On the table was a small ledger book two pages of which in the back also showed pictures of children.⁵¹

This reference to "a small ledger book" probably serves to identify this volume as the one containing the picture of Annie Aronburg. "He told me he admired the picture very much, having left it with other pictures of children in some small book and all the pictures disappeared."⁵² Evans, distracted by the presence of a host of Glandelinian officers

occupying the room, fails to recognize how close he has come to the discovery of the lost picture. Responsive to his own exuberant fantasy, rather than bare reality, Darger fills his room to bursting with the enemy.

But more strange still, around the table was seated at least three score of the highest Glandelinian generals that Evans had ever faced in his life. What they were up to he did not know, but he was nevertheless suspicious and, leaving the window, entered the house, after giving a signal for his staff to surround the house, and then entering the palace like building, he made from room to room as cautiously as a cat with pistol drawn, until he reached the door of the room where the sixty officers of the foe were seated around the big table.

All the details of this dramatic scene need not concern us here, but part of the conversation which Evans overhears is of particular interest, since it raises questions concerning Darger's feelings of uncertainty about the contents of his room and his collection of pictures of little girls. It also becomes evident that the Glandelinian generals are not aware of whose room they are in.

"I wonder who in hell owns all these pictures of children," asked another of the leaders. "I would not care about it, but they are children of Angelinian nationality because they look it. The recent owner of this building ought to be punished for keeping pictures of christian children." "Never mind those darn old pictures and get down to business."

The excitement mounts when Evans reveals his presence, and is shot at by an enraged general.

Evans fired simultaneously, and sent the gun flying into one of the picture frames holding a number of children ... They had planned to capture Evans and got captured by him instead. Evans had captured three score Glandelinian generals single handed.

Unfortunately, he forgot the pictures in the process, and the last chance for the recovery of the missing photograph was thereby lost.

In Darger's Room: Unexplained Traces of a Lost Little Girl

The murdered Annie Aronburg makes a brief appearance in an unexpected place. Shortly after his return to Chicago in 1909, Darger made a careful copy of a catechism.⁵³ Dated by him, 1909, and "published by Ecclesiastical Authority, in Baltimoria Angelinia," it begins with an "Introduction" by Annie Aronburg!

My name is Annie Aronburg leader of the main army of child rebels, under my assistants Angelinia Aronburg, Kenneth Casy, and Mary Stanck who lost her leg at the fight at Lawndale. I have received warnings that I am in danger of assassination but as horrible as it is to be murdered in cold blood I defy my enemies before God to do it. Since I copied the catechism I am now planning to advance my army of 10,000 rebels, all eighteen years

old, against Andrean: Though I am only ten, I am able to lead them and have to do so, and will do so again.⁵⁴

Evidently then, the person who copied the catechism was not Darger, despite the evidence of his handwriting, but Annie Aronburg. Far more surprising is her next statement concerning authorship: "I am the full writer of the manuscript as far as it goes of the battles raging with the Glandelinians and the rebels at the child labor places, and will have them published as soon as I can."⁵⁵ What we seem to be witnessing is a confusing merging of the personalities of Annie Aronburg and Henry Darger, with Annie Aronburg claiming to be the author of at least the early volumes of *The Realms*.⁵⁶ On occasion, Darger even signs himself Henry Aronburg Darger.

DURING WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN a particularly confused period in his life, which occurs, I believe, just after his discharge from the US army in December 1917, Darger began altering envelopes and letters addressed to him, removing his own name, and in part rewriting them so that they now appeared to have been sent to one or another of the Aronburg sisters, Annie or Angelina. One of these, a letter sent by a nun, Sister Rose, who was living at the Marillac Seminary, is of particular importance. Dated June 19, 1917, it begins as follows:

My dear Henry [crossed out] Aronburg
Both of your letters reached me and
I am grateful for your kind thought. I am
glad that you are trying to be "even a
better girl" since I left ["boy" erased, and
"girl" inked in]. Keep it up Aronburg ...⁵⁷

Apart from the systematic change of names and pronouns, the letter is of unique importance in that it appears to refer to events connected with

an early stage in the evolution of *The Realms*. "I was very much interested in your account of the Catholic Lodge, and, if your writing about it pleases you, be sure that Sr. Rose will also be interested." It is probable that Henry had written to Sister Rose about the Black Brothers Lodge, and the origins of the Gemini, the child protection society which was to play a very significant part in his story. It is as Supreme Person of this society that Darger enters *The Realms of the Unreal*. That he, in 1917, was attempting to share his writings with another human being is, in itself, of enormous importance. More difficult to understand is his subsequent attempt to change the recipient of the letter to a little girl.

A SECOND ENVELOPE and letter, this one an official document from the US army, is postmarked January 5, 1918.⁵⁸ It has been readdressed to "Annie Aronburg, Calverine, Calverinia." The return address has also been modified to read "War Department [in type], Camp of Rebel Army [added]." Both the envelope and the letter it contained were obviously changed shortly after they were received. The letter itself is now addressed to Angelina Aronburg, from Camp Grant, Rockford, Angelina, and has been redated January 5, 1911 ["1918" having been crossed out]. The new date shifts events mentioned in the letter back in time to the period when the war in the Realms of the Unreal was just getting underway. The obvious changes seem to imply a strong link between the outbreak of the war in *The Realms*, and the forced termination of Darger's military career in December 1917. But what was Darger's intention in turning the salutation "Dear Sir" into "Dear Angelina Aronburg?"

LOOKING BACK across a lifetime, it is all but impossible to determine how much of this was "real." To what extent was Darger playacting? To what extent was he lost in an increasingly delusional inner world over which he had little or no control? In what sense had he become Annie Aronburg? And why was it precisely the "empty" character of the murdered child whose identity Darger chose to assume?

What does seem clear from these strange altered documents found in his room is that both external reality and the self were increasingly being drained of significance, replaced by an all encompassing involvement with fantasy.⁵⁹ Imagination seems to have taken over, allowing or compelling Henry to enter a world characterized by remarkably fluid shifts in gender, in age, and in identity; a world in which little girls possess penises and fight in war with astonishing success; a world in which little girls could be murdered, assassinated by ruthless and unfeeling adults.

If we are, in fact, dealing with psychosis at this time, it would seem likely that it was his experience and his failure in the military which profoundly undermined his hold on reality, intensifying disturbances which were present during the whole of the period he documents in *The Realms* (1909-10), if not far earlier. It was during this period that *The Realms* began to come into being: with his creativity at its height, an alternate world took shape and shadowy figures assumed greater and greater density. The single event which Darger himself associated with this shift in reality was the loss of a photograph, the picture of little Annie Aronburg.

A FINAL DOCUMENT from this period, a letter entirely in Henry's own hand, warns Annie Aronburg of her imminent fate.

June 19, 1911

My Dear Friend Annie Aronburg,

I wrote you this letter, warning you that Governor Thomas Federal has ordered Assistant Governor Raymond Richardson Federal to bring on your immediate death right away for your vigilant excess in the leadership of the child rebels and it is advisable to fly, for he will get you if you don't. This is a Gemini General who has written you.

Your Friendly Assistant

J.F.P. Mery.

Shortly after this letter was received we may assume that Annie Aronburg met her death at the hands of Raymond Richardson Federal. Not surprisingly, the warning letter written by J. F. P. Mery, alias Henry Darger, turns up years later in the safe in Snider's Barn.

Seeing a letter lying in another small box [Starring] took it out of the envelope and as the little girls gathered around him in a cluster he unfolded the slip of paper which was quite large and this is what he read:

June the nineteenth, nineteen eleven.

My Dear Friend Annie Aronburg;

I wrote you this letter warning you that governor Tomas Federal has ordered assistant governor Raymond Richardson Federal to bring on your immediate death right away for your viligeant excesses in the leadership of the "Child Rebels," and

it is advisable to fly for he will get you if you don't. This is a Gemini Gemie who has written.

Your friendly assistant,

Fred J.P. Merry.

THE ACTUAL EXISTENCE of the readdressed letters, as physical objects, not part of *The Realms* but somehow part of Henry's life, throws crucial light on the very different creative process at work here.⁶⁰ Henry, at least at this early stage in his life (he was twenty-five in 1917), seems to have entered *The Realms*, and had in some sense become lost in them. He appears to be merging with characters in his story, instead of externalizing himself in an imaginative narrative. The narrative was taking over his existence. Annie Aronburg appears to be taking possession of her creator, who in his child self seems to have been a little girl. The transformed letters, with his name and identity erased, demonstrate the tenuousness of his hold on reality, the instability of his sense of self. With the letters, evidence of the reality of the Realms of the Unreal, casually lying about Henry's room, it is easy to anticipate that they would, in time, find their way into *The Realms*.⁶¹ This is, in fact, precisely what happened.⁶²

IN THE FINAL VOLUME of *The Realms*, a Glandelinian spy is captured at a secret midnight meeting of the Gemini. The spy, to the astonishment of everyone, turns out to be a woman. On her person four letters are found, all of which are modified versions of the readdressed letters found in Darger's room. That they appear only in the last volume probably implies a long time-lag between their

being received and readdressed (1917), and the moment when they found their way into *The Realms*. In making the transition from the room to *The Realms*, from "reality" to the Realms of the Unreal, they required only slight modification, since they were already the property of Annie Aronburg, stolen after her death by a female spy.⁶³

An example is the letter from Sister Rose. Originally changed only by the addition of a new name and pronouns, it now contains references to the war. Sister Rose asks Annie:

"[to] help all you can to assist in reducing child-slavery, which is the desire of your best friend, Sister Cammillia ... in relation to stopping child-slavery ... we are well protected by the christian soldiery, and so you will do better by leading your armies of insurgents elsewhere."⁶⁴

Through these additions to a pre-existing letter, Sister Rose, a real person, is brought across the border into the Realms of the Unreal. Sister Cammillia then writes, "God will take care of you, we are all praying hard for you, so that your threatened assassination will not occur."⁶⁵ On the other hand, the letter from J. F. P. Mery, warning Annie of her imminent assassination, because it was completely invented by Darger, required no modification. A single addition serves to locate it more precisely in the history of *The Realms*: "from the trouble brewing all around, it seems possible that war will break out between Angelinia and Glandelinia any day now." This accords perfectly with the situation in June 1911, when the letter purports to have been written.

The capture of a spy with letters addressed to Annie Aronburg in her possession raises the possibility of obtaining more information about her murder.

... the leader of the Gemini was suspicious that she knew something about the little girl who had been so cruelly murdered by her assassin, and decided to hold her for a rigid investigation and force any information out of her that was possible. He said to her, "Do you know anything about this little girl called Annie Aronburg who was murdered by her three assassins?"

Sadly, the stubborn woman proves uncooperative, and in fact attempts to muddy the waters by inventing a false account of Annie's death.

She was really killed during the battle of Erminie Creek ... Stepped in the way of a machine gun. It was more her own fault than anything else. She took the chances in saving the officers, and paid with her life.⁶⁶

This story is immediately rejected by the assembled body of Gemini, who clearly know a good deal about the facts of Annie's murder. "You lie, you lie! ... and here is a letter to prove it." They produce a document signed by General Wienstien, which not only refutes her story, but supplies us with an important new fact. "The real dead body of the murdered Aronburg child was found in Albuns Ravine at Aronburg's Run by general Starring, and Violet and her sisters."

The Discovery of the Body of the Murdered Annie Aronburg

The curious story of the discovery of the body of the murdered child, long after her death, is one of the more morbid events in *The Realms*, and a testament to the strangeness of Darger's ruminations about the death of this little girl. It is told by Walter Starring, a Christian boy scout, who we have already encountered briefly. The Vivian girls ask him where the murder occurred. His reply is a big surprise.

"Can you pick out for us and the boys where the murder was committed?"

"Easy," said Starring. "I've also heard that by the power of God her body is still lying there undecayed for the purpose of its being discovered. I'll let you see it as soon as we reach that locality ..."⁶⁷

It is something of a paradox, that while the missing photograph of the murdered child remains throughout *The Realms* a matter of enormous significance, the discovery of her mortal remains is treated with pathological sangfroid by everyone concerned. This gruesome story departs so far from the norms of conventional narrative as to raise questions concerning Darger's hold on reality.

Starring and the little girls followed the large columns of christians as they charged toward the enemy into the woods, with the purpose of finding where the body lay ... "It was in these woods where Tamerline butchered her," said Starring. "We will soon reach the place where I and general Darger first saw the corpse."

Violet and her sisters shuddered at the aspects of the woods which seemed to be dark and forbidden like some haunted

forest of the demons and constantly pierced by flashes of enemies guns ...

It was a long tedious climb down into the very bottom of the ravine which was very deep, but at last the bottom was reached and they went to where Starring followed, coming upon the body lying naked and outstretched on the gravel just the way it had been left. To their surprise the intestines were gone, only the flesh and bones being left. The worms had only eaten the inside organs and left the rest so that everything was empty inside.

"It is funny as I expected to see the intestines still inside of her," said Starring kind of seriously. "But I'm glad that we don't see such a horrible sight. But this is where the murder was committed. And since we seen it it is our duty to bury the corpse and he ordered several of the boys to start a grave."⁶⁸

Perhaps significantly, the Vivian girls prevent the burial of the body, seemingly to retain it as material evidence of the crime. "The body was then left until general Viviania could accomplish his awful task."

Darger's speculations about the body of the murdered child don't end here. Indeed, in this passage he seems to be planning ahead, raising puzzling issues which he obviously intends to return to in later volumes. An example is the problem of the whereabouts of the child's missing internal organs. Darger was not at all unwilling to come to grips with this gruesome question. Given his pathological obsession with the removal of material from the body cavity of little girls, it is obvious he will want to locate the missing body parts.

In volume eleven of *The Realms* a veritable anatomical museum surfaces in the collection of a minor Glandelinian general, Richardson Tamerline.⁶⁹ Having saved the Vivian girls, he now proves even more helpful to the Christian cause, by presenting them with a document which identifies the murderers of their little friend.

Raymond Richardson Federal, you are rewarded with a great medal of honor for your execution of the little child slave rebel leader Annie Aronburg, sister of Angelinia Aronburg, and it is your duty when you resume or assume command of the armies of Glandelinia to make it all in your power to run down her sister also.

King of Glandelinia, Procilliene Gandla of Glandon.⁷⁰

However, this moonlit scene rapidly shifts into stark madness when a soldier presents the children, and their adult friend General Viviania, with a number of parcels, "Proofs of the murder."

General Viviania ... began to examine the contents of the packages. In one package which was large the contents were the hearts of lungs of the dead child, the bottom of the package being covered with dried blood. Viviania dropped it in horror.

"Good God." gasped all who saw it, "How did Tamerline come in possession of these things?" With shaking hands general Viviania laid the gory package on the table, and opening the remainder saw a pile of the child's intestines.

"Goodness gracious." gasped general Viviania almost letting it drop and looking at the soldier as if he had committed a murder, "What did you bring these for. And what in the world did the murderer

preserve these for?" Hastily wrapping it up, general Viviania with his hands trembling as if with the ague undid the third package which was a large slip of yellow paper with the [en]closed prescription:

"Who ever retains the terrible relics will never get over the horrors of it. Anna Aronburg, a child only less than eight years of age, was murdered by Raymond Richardson Federal personally, in Snydiers barn, being slashed open alive, and left to die that way. Who has ever the nerve to destroy these relics will perish miserably for they will be stricken by God. Under any circumstances they must not be restored in the dead body lying in a deep ravine unless the murderer is punished, and they are to be retained by those who receive them unless the murderer is brought to justice. These relics have been taken out of the body of the dead child, by the murderer who put them in these packages, to inspire him on, in his murderous slaughters. Do not even allow the relics to lay round as someone else may destroy them. This is the order of one of the Blengiglomenean Creatures. The body of the child is not decayed yet."

Nearly a dozen times general Viviania read the note, then carefully examined the intestines to see if any of them were missing.⁷¹

The Vision in the Sky

The mode of Annie Aronburg's death, by strangulation followed by the opening of her abdomen, is of great importance, in that these specific forms of assault on the bodies of little girls obsessed Darger throughout his life. Literally millions of little girls were to die in this way during the course of *The Realms*. It is evident that Darger was haunted by a vision of a child being murdered in this extreme form, with Annie Aronburg perhaps the first to die in this way early in the story.

At the end of his life the same vision, now projected onto the sky, continued to trouble his imagination (9.4). The image of a child being murdered, by hands clasped around her throat, now appears in the clouds, gigantic and terrible, assuming the form of the overwhelmingly powerful tornado, "Sweetie Pie," which dominates his final work, *The History of My Life*.⁷² In describing the unfolding of this vision in the sky, over and over again, Darger re-enacts the murder of Annie Aronburg in terrifying detail. The image of the strangled child, first seen in pictorial form in *The Realms*, now takes on new dimensions as we learn of its strange nature and limitless rage.

Another Description of the Gleason Orphanage Horror

I saw the same horror that you did but maybe worse and the shape of the cloud too ... I thought I heard my little eight year old daughter coughing as if she was half strangling on something she swallowed the wrong way. I asked her what happened.



9.4
Henry Darger
Untitled [Vision of
Child being Strangled
in the Sky]. Detail.
Collage-drawing.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

"It's not me," she said, "It's coming from the dark cloud."

"John," cried my wife, "Come out and look at a most peculiar cloud formation." ...

"Like you told, it also appeared to us like a little girl's head turned sideways with clouds form like hands around the neck in a strangling grip, with her tongue sticking out and mouth wide open. Coming from the wide open mouth and tongue was that coughing strangling sound ...

As I said before, I cannot give an exact description of its figure than comparing it to the form of a child being strangled, head slightly lowered and tongue sticking out as far as it could go. The lower part of the cloud connecting to the neck was in awful convulsions like a strangling child would be, another section of the cloud seemed to rise-up to a great length like struggling arms and legs.⁷³

It is clear that Darger is describing the same picture in the sky which he depicted in the illustrations to *The Realms*, though now, using words, he can add additional information: the choking sounds issuing from its mouth, struggling arms and legs, and the awful convulsions of the cloud-hands crushing the neck. He seems to be confronted with an overwhelmingly powerful vision, a reality which has taken possession of his imagination, or perhaps his memory, dominating his life as it dominates the sky. But now, that image in the sky is no longer passive, but possessed of terrible destructive force.

At the end of his life, as we have already noted, Henry seemed to understand how strange his obsession with this subject was.

These no doubt were singular fancies to occupy a man's mind in such unusual extremity, and I have often thought since, that the sight of the revolutions of the immense shroud round the funnel of death might have rendered me somewhat light headed.⁷⁴

It comes as no surprise to learn that this mysterious tornado claims the lives of thousands of children, especially of children living in orphanages. What is astonishing is how their deaths occur.

Death came to so many children almost instantly. It was not a matter of hours or minutes. It was a matter of seconds. They died by their breath being drawn out of their lungs — by the awful pull of the winds at their nose and mouth. And their bodies flung about so violently were mangled afterwards.⁷⁵

In short, they were smothered and died from lack of air. The strangled child is now exacting terrible revenge, reaching down from the sky to kill indiscriminately. Not surprisingly, it is her tongue which assumes unique importance, for it is the tongue/phallus which becomes the ultimate image of destruction, the funnel of the tornado. Darger describes the sudden terrifying transformation as all hell breaks loose:

The abdominal part of the cloud spread or bulged outward as if it was going to burst open as by a sudden gust of too much air that impelled it. Then it seemed pressed back by its own inward motion. Finally the tongue seemed to come to protrude out more, and at that instant, from

it connecting with the belly, shot forth a snake twisted form of lightening the brightness of which I never saw before and turned the unusual coming darkness as bright as the most brightest day. Oh, my God, I never in all my life heard such heaven splitting thunder ... When I looked again the tongue, though the mouth was open somewhat wider, was gone completely.

The tongue had suddenly, very very suddenly, assumed a very very different distinct and different definite existence in a long revolving writhing column of a more than a mile and a half in diameter near the ground ... the part of the cloud that had formed like the head of a child being strangled was in awful convulsions or lashed in the most ungovernable fury ...

That whole what had been the head seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting cloudy channels all in the most frenzied convulsions, while the cloud connecting with the neck was gyrating in gigantic and innumerable vortices, and all whirling and plunging on to the eastward ... I cannot dare to describe, even to save my life, the terrible shrieks and yells that went up to heaven and skies from the upper cloud connected with the revolving terror. Oh, God help those who are in the path, I cried.⁷⁶

The desperate intensity of Darger's description of this vision in the clouds, and its utter strangeness, literally demands explanation. What possible experience could have summoned this specter into being, what could have unleashed such overwhelming rage and fear? While the fundamental image is that of the strangled child, a second phenomenon calls attention to itself, again and again, as Darger returns over and over to the cloud specter — the swollen belly which threatens to explode. As we will see shortly (chapter 11), this is connected with an obsession no less compelling than the image of strangulation, a compulsive preoccupation with the disemboweling of little girls.

... we heard a still most terrific whoose explosive sound from the direction of the kenetic harridan. We saw that the belly had burst wide open from top to bottom, with a whoose and flop sound seeming to crush everything [to] pancake flatness. There gushed out of this torn out opening, which was wider than a mile, an awful mass of cloud.⁷⁷

The Ghost of Annie Aronburg

The unexplained bond which links Darger and Annie Aronburg does not come to an end with her death. In fact, their real relationship commences only once she has become a "celestial child" who appears to him as a ghost.⁷⁸ But strangely he chose not to include her supernatural appearances to him in *The Realms*. Instead, his detailed account of her several materializations forms part of the separate journal which I have chosen to call his "Reference Ledger."⁷⁹ This important collection of lists and other documents includes a number of more personal records, including a version of the "Predictions and Threats," and the extremely intimate list of questions, "Found on Sidewalk." It contains various reminders to himself, bits of personal history, and long lists of material connected with *The Realms* which he needed to organize and keep track of. It is, therefore, significant that the supernatural appearances of Annie Aronburg, which were intended to influence Darger's behavior in *The Realms*, are included in this more personal journal.

But then, obviously struck by the beauty of these dramatic encounters with a ghost, Darger decided at some point to include them in his story, but only after removing all references to himself. In *The Realms* Annie's ghost does materialize, but instead of appearing to Darger, she pays her far less meaningful visits to General Whilliamsburger Zimmermann.⁸⁰ We will examine both versions to see what can be learned. These four visions of the murdered child, in their original form, and in their secondary transformation, are among the most powerful of Darger's dramatic inventions.

The First Appearance of the Ghost of Annie Aronburg

It was on November the fourteenth 1911, that though the terrible war is still raging, I have on account of the loss of the picture of the Aronburg child, who was murdered by one of the Tamerlines, or Federals, that I have, though still a correspondent, quit taking in the accounts of the many battles already past since March, and those now raging ...

I have either for two or three battles, seen the actual child Annie Aronburg or her spirit. During the battle of Marcocello, second battle, I mean, the Glandelinian storm of onslaught was coming on with a fury that knew no bounds. Unable to stand the frightful scene and the terrific ear-splitting roar of musketry which almost shocked my very heart, and caused, frenzy, I left the scene as quickly as I could.

Just as I reached Jennies bridge, near Marcucian, I was suddenly aware of a person following me. Though I took no part in the frightful war, only being a war correspondent, I nevertheless had a great dread of the Glandelinian soldiery, though I did have luke warm sympathy for their cause because of the loss. Drawing my pistol I suddenly wheeled upon my follower intending to shoot without hesitation as I expected no mercy from any Glandelinian who would suspect me as an Angelinian spy. To my consternation I beheld before me a little girl, the very likeness of the one in the picture I lost. I lost all my fear then, but said rather seriously, "Little one

it ain't polite to scare a person like that. I thought you was a skulking Glandelinian following me."

It immediately becomes clear that Annie's appearance to Darger is no accident, but has a direct bearing on the Aronburg mystery, and the lost photograph. Seemingly unaware, as yet, that his visitor is a ghost, he is in no mood to yield to her demands.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"My name is Annie Aronburg," she answered to my further consternation. "Couldn't you for my sake withdraw the curse on the christians because of your loss?"

I answered, "Don't know about that. It ain't my doing, and you ought to know it." She begged me persistently but the more she pleaded and teased the more I refused. She then grew angry and told me that sticking for the enemies of Our Lord was an act of sacrilegious treason to God, that by remaining so, I would never obtain the manuscript or picture that I lost, and that I was really a wicked man to refuse the request she begged of me."

Being aroused I said, "Don't talk to me like that you little winsome lamb," and attempted to seize her to give her a shaking up, but no one was there. As a large tree was standing, just a foot from me, I quickly ran around it expecting that she had darted behind it but she was not there. I looked everywhere but in vain. She was gone! My didn't I feel queer. I left the spot as quickly as possible, feeling the guilt of having insulted a celestial being.

Darger's stubbornness, and his unwillingness to give anything without receiving something in return, is absolutely characteristic (see p. 71). What is odd, however, is that the lost picture of Annie Aronburg seems here to possess far greater importance to him than his relationship with the actual little girl depicted in it, who now stands before him. In his "aroused" state he seems perfectly capable of strangling this "little winsome lamb," but he is unable to get hold of her. That his stubbornness also places him in defiant opposition to God seems not to concern him in the least. He will not yield.

The Second Appearance of the Ghost of Annie Aronburg

For days and days while out on various battle fields I expected to see her again.

I did at Phelantonburg after, first being pursued by the Glandelinians, and then by the Abbieannians who mistook me for a Glandelinian soldier on account of my gray uniform. I escaped them both.

I may have been thirty or fourty feet from McHollester River, when the same little girl, dressed all in white with hands outstretched toward me pleadingly, and swaying back and forth as light as a breeze, her curly yellow hair looking yet more yellow in the afternoon sun, suddenly appeared almost under my horse's feet. My white horse had been used by families with small children, so long that she instantly stopped without me telling her to, casting her eyes down toward the child, and pricking up both ears.

I suddenly cried to her; "Why, where under the sun did you come from in such a storm of distant battle as this?" The nearest house wrecked by a high explosive was half or three leagues away, and I knew there were no children there.

I then decided to ride along side of her and pick her up, but I never did, for as soon as the horse started, the child started too, with the same swaying motion, always just a little ahead of the horse and looking back over her shoulder, reproachfully at me. I never thought at the time how impossible it would be for a child to go so fast.

The image of the celestial child, adrift on the breeze, floating "with the same swaying motion," always just in front of Darger's moving horse, and looking back reproachfully over her shoulder, is unforgettable. Darger never depicted this amazing image in his illustrations, perhaps because, even in written form, it is so intensely visual. The reference to "her curly yellow hair," while perfectly in accord with the hair color of the Aronburg sisters, and Darger's personal tastes, also conforms exactly to the missing photograph. The scene is characterized by restrained colors suitable to an apparition: the afternoon sunlight, the white horse which complements Annie's white robes, and Darger's gray uniform which is suggestive of his ambivalent support of the Glandelinian cause and his break with the Christians.

Darger's horse is a delightfully irrational creation: the fact that she "had been used by families with small children," invented on the spur of the moment, so as to explain her far more sensitive, if not mystical response to a celestial child. As usual, Darger seems unaware that he is dealing with the supernatural, and is consistently unresponsive.

The horse never took its eye off the little girl and neither did I. She ran on until she came near to a farm, went through a fence, and sat down facing me, frowning and pointing a threatening finger at me. When I came pretty close I dismounted, the child suddenly darting diagonally across the road to a telegraph pole, the wires being down, and ran around, peeking out from the other side at me, this pole being located in the corner of a wheat field. I hurried after the child when she ran around the pole, crying out, "Why you little scamp, don't you think I can catch you?" and I made a dive around the pole only to find her looking so threateningly at me that I did not have the nerve to touch her.

"Do not dare touch me you friend of the Glandelinians," she screamed. "You refused my request, and yet by making you follow me, I saved your life. From where you first stood a mine had been exploded by your would be friends."

I didn't answer, but drew my sabre to flourish it toward her, but only to find empty air. Not a thing in sight, not even a bird or a cloud to make a shadow. I waited excitedly for her to reappear, for I couldn't imagine

what had happened. The wheat had been cut and shucked, by the Glandelinian farmers residing in this region, but the nearest shuck was a long way to the pole, and the little girl couldn't possibly have got to the shuck without me seeing her.⁸¹

I looked and looked, but never discovered a trace of anything. No one can describe my feelings which I had. I fully believed that she had been murdered and that God had allowed her spirit to appear before my [gap] [eyes?] and that I not only refused her request, but God's as well. After this occurrence I continued my work and though I soon forgot about her, I was more determined to recover her picture, or another one like it.

Annie Aronburg asks nothing of Darger on this occasion; instead she saves his life, protecting him from a Glandelinian landmine, which had conveniently, but soundlessly, exploded on the spot where he had just been standing. She, nevertheless, seems to understand that he is dangerous, and will not allow him to approach her. That her view of the situation is correct is made more than evident when he draws his sword and flourishes it in her direction, a gesture calling to mind the act of evisceration which had sealed her fate. His inability to respond to the fact that his life has just been preserved by her miraculous intervention, and his irrational attempt to attack a mere child with his sabre, suggests the extreme ambivalence inherent in his feelings for this child. That he would represent a real danger to her, were she not a ghost, might incline us to question the veracity of his account of her murder.

We are not told how much time intervenes between each of the appearances of the celestial child, but changes in Darger's attitude suggest the passage of considerable time. At her third appearance he seems more responsive, even conciliatory. On this occasion it is he who attempts to save her. Once again, the vision begins with a pictorial image of haunting beauty.

The Third Appearance of the Ghost of Annie Aronburg

It was a day when I was at a safe distance, watching the crushing onslaught of the Concentinian cavarly, against the Omarians at McWhirther Run, that I had a similar experience. I had been riding toward the McWhirther Run when I thought sure I heard her call me, though however her voice seemed far away and weak. In looking toward the placid waters of the river, I thought sure I saw the beautiful child in the water with lily pads all around her. All I could see was her face, her eyes so large and such an exploring look in them, and her arms extended as if beckoning me to come, she was slowly sinking in the water and all but her face had disappeared. I rode hastily toward the river intending to wade in and draw her out of the water when, to my utter astonishment I saw her on the road beckoning to me to come away from the water. I was more flabbergasted than ever.

Was it really the child's spirit still persistent in her request? As I obeyed her call I felt touched in spite of myself. I rode up close to her, expecting her to dart away like she did before, but this time she came right up to me with a look of reproach in her eyes. This time she told me that a great struggle in the war was soon coming, a terrible battle at Glorinia or Aronburg's Run, and she begged me earnestly to keep away from it as I would not be safe any longer, as I did not grant her request. I answered, "My child, I realize now my mistake, in being harsh to you. But I swear before God that I have one way to grant your request. And that I will tell you, and do if you will reveal to me why you appear to me and disappear in such a mysterious fashion."

She looked at me at this, and then said, "I told you before who I am. I'm Annie Aronburg. I was cruelly murdered by Raymond Richardson Federal because I was a leader of the rebel children who rebelled against our masters to gain our freedom from slavery and misery. As you was the one who had secured my picture, and many other articles once belonging to me, I had trust that as you alone have the situation of both sides in your power, I decided to appeal to you to avenge my assassination, or the poor Vivian girls will have to die for me to save their nation and father's armies from complete ruin and defeat at the hands of their Glandelinian enemies.

"You refused my request until I appealed a second time, and this is the time. If you refuse this time all will be lost for the foe will be victorious." I answered that I would do my best, to do all that she requested but that I must under any conditions recover the picture first, that I was not an enemy of God or of the poor Angelinians, and that the return of the picture must be so forthcoming to bring about the success of the Christians. I had in the meantime continued on my way slowly, the child following, when just as I was going to speak again, I was started by the near approach of battle. I then looked around, but she was gone.

In this complex exchange, much is revealed, and much remains obscure. The ghost of the murdered child demonstrates both her prophetic powers, and her ultimate powerlessness in the face of a greater moral law. She describes the great and decisive Battle of Glorinia or Aronburg's Run, which will in fact occur toward the end of the war.⁸² Assuming something of the stature of the Goddesses of the Iliad, she echoes their impotence when confronted by fate, stressing her inability any longer to protect Darger in battle. The implications of his failure to yield to her entreaties are now seen to involve far more than his personal destiny. If he remains obdurate in his refusal to withdraw the curse on the Christian armies, "all will be lost for the foe will be victorious." He is called upon to embrace the Christian cause and to avenge her assassination. Failure to do this may result in the death of the Vivian girls, or the total destruction of their father's armies.⁸³

Darger, for his part, is obviously touched and puzzled by her repeated appearances and her efforts on his behalf. He asks her to explain: "Why do you appear to me and disappear in such a mysterious fashion?" This question, the answer to which is so obvious to us, seems to reflect genuine anguish and confusion on Darger's part. Why can he not rid himself of the image of the murdered child?

In her explanation Annie Aronburg acknowledges something about which we have not heard before, his godlike power, not in *The Realms*, but as their author. "You alone have the situation of both sides in your power." But Darger too is bound by factors beyond his control, forces inherent in the Aronburg mystery itself. While he confesses he is not an enemy of God or of the poor Angelinians, he is powerless to help them. "I swear before God that I have one way to grant your request." But, once again, it becomes apparent that what is involved is still the return of the picture; without that he is helpless to avoid the tragic fate of the Christians in the great war. At the heart of the Aronburg mystery is Darger's inability to yield. Confronted with the terrible implications of his impossible demands, he continues, before God, to ask for justice: the granting of his petition, the return of the photograph of little Annie Aronburg. The reason for this irrational, but overwhelming, necessity remains unclear, the true nature of the Aronburg mystery unexplained.

The Fourth Appearance of the Ghost of Annie Aronburg

The fourth time I met her and the last was at Aronburg's Run, I having witnessed all its surpassing horrors. She was attired as a celestial child this time, only appearing a moment smiling at me and then was gone. I haven't seen her since, but I have now joined the Christian armies, am an officer, and have been leading one of the fiercest charges at Logan Zoe Rae Run.

... My two losses have been very serious, but the loss of the Aronburg picture has been the greatest, has caused the frightful disasters during the battles, the torment of the Vivian girls, and the frightful fury of the great war.

Annie Aronburg's four appearances to General Williamsburger Zimmermann, in volume one of *The Realms*, are modeled very closely on the description of her appearances to Darger.⁸⁴ The adaptation, or modification, of the text was done with great skill, providing evidence of Darger's ability to manipulate previously existing prose to fit specific situations. It is very evident that the text recorded in the "Reference Ledger" is the original. Less obvious is Darger's motivation in carefully writing himself out of the revised account. In doing so he inevitably deprived the appearances of the murdered child of much of their dramatic rationale, since Annie now "appears" without any compelling reason to do so, since she requires nothing of General Zimmermann. The element of confrontation is lost, and Annie is now reduced to a helpful spirit endeavoring to assist a kindly old

Christian general. With all ambivalence removed on both sides, their meeting is simply charming and polite.

"I'm little Annie Aronburg. I have come to help you so that you are not worsted in this conflict. I'm a celestial being, and can do all you wish if only you'll follow my instructions and watch my movements." I answered, "I'm glad to know you are a celestial being. And I presume it is God who had you sent to help me against his foes."

Annie's materialization before Darger and his horse, undergoes an unsuccessful transformation, as she is now forced to appear before an entire cavalry troop.

She appeared so suddenly that all the soldiers who saw her were amazed and awed ... The general realized that it was the spirit of little Annie Aronburg, and as she did not answer his questions, but begged him and his men to follow her, they decided to ride alongside of her, and do all she said, a great awe filling the men as they realized they were in the presence of a celestial child of heaven.

As soon as the child started forward, the whole troop of christian cavarly rushed forward too, and the child continued on with the same swaying motion ... always keeping herself ahead of the horsemen, and looking back over her little naked white shoulder, at the dashing horsemen.

Given the faintly seductive tone which creeps into this revision, it almost seems as if we are dealing with an adaptation made for the movies. Is this an example of Darger's curious and unexpected ability to adapt to the demands of conventional reality? He eliminates himself from the encounter, thereby shifting events onto a more impersonal plane, and then seems to feel free to intensify what can only be described as erotic elements in the behavior of both the child and the adult. This becomes evident in his subtle rewriting of Annie's appearance among the water lilies.

I had been riding tward the small stream called Flopper Brook, when I thought sure I heard a child's familiar voice calling me ... looking tward the placid waters of the beautiful brook, I saw the beautiful child swimming as it appeared in the water with beautiful lily pads all around her. All I could see at times was her head, face, and bare arms, her eyes being large and had such a happy look in them that I was overawed, and her beautiful graceful little arms were extended as if beckoning me to come, and she seemed at times to disappear in the water entirely, to appear again at another point.

On her last appearance to the old general, Annie offers far more of a boon than the faint smile afforded to poor Darger.

... after the battle I met her and this time she was attired completely as a celestial child, only appearing for an hour, and smiling at me she allowed me to hold her in my arms for all that time, and then, leaving me with a beautiful heavenly fragrance, she was gone back to her beautiful home of indescribable happiness.

Amidst so much sweetness and light, Darger cannot resist inserting an element of ambivalence or, more precisely, of truth. So, hidden amongst the crowd of anonymous enemy soldiers, is a possible Henry Darger who only we can recognize. Granted anonymity, a great deal of truth emerges in this brief encounter:

... as I was urging my men on, I noticed one of the rallied Glandelinian soldiers making a dive around the pole with the intention of seizing her, but she looked so threateningly at him that the Glandelinian soldier did not have the nerve to touch her, even with his bayonet. "Do not you dare touch me you devil of a Glandelinian, a friend of the Hell fiends, a child assassin," she screamed. "If you do, I'll smite you down to Hell." He ran as if all the demons were after him.

Annie seems more candid dealing with this anonymous Glandelinian, as well as with the harmless old general who refuses her nothing. She confesses that he is not the only one to whom she has appeared.

I appeared to one man a great number of times called Darger, but he has as yet refused my request because he lost many things belonging to him, and so to you I made the appeal. If you refused all would be lost on account of it.

This assertion is curiously unconvincing. Zimmermann, despite Annie's assurances to the contrary, does not "have the situation of both sides in [his] hands."⁸⁵ That can be said only of God, or of the author of *The Realms*, who in all of the 15,000 pages of his story never yields to her entreaties, or drops his demand that her picture be returned. The Aronburg mystery remains

unresolved. Only a single hint of a possible solution is offered, tantalizingly, because it is, in fact, never followed up on.

IN THE FINAL VOLUME of *The Realms*, Annie appears to her sister Angelina Aronburg, and to her adopted sisters the Vivian girls.

Violet and her sisters had proceeded along the beautiful creek bank of the Erminie, called the Flanderline river, they perceived a peculiar looking child sitting down by the nearest tree. She looked unusual in her appearance, her dressing was strangely more like the celestial regions for she only wore a small white robe, which was sleeveless, and wore what seemed a peculiar set of diamonds on her head which sparkled like fire.

Violet and her sisters proceeded toward the strange child slowly, and getting nearer Gertrude Angeline held back and motioning to her sisters said, "It's little Annie Aronburg as sure as I live. It's my dead sister."

At first Violet and her sisters became awed and were almost afraid to approach nearer, but the stranger, conscious of their near presence, arose to her feet and was beside them before they realized what had happened.⁸⁶

On this occasion, Annie merely warns them of impending danger, and disappears. However, in another appearance she makes a surprising promise to the girls.

I will reveal to you the Aronburg mystery, as it is called, two months after the war is over. It is only you little girls, and your best guardians, who deserve to

hear this secret. Afterwards you can publish it if you like. With this the vision disappeared slowly, leaving a great fragrance in the room.⁸⁷

As no volume has yet been found describing events occurring immediately after the war, the Aronburg mystery remains unsolved. Perhaps the Vivian girls decided not to publish.

An Attempt at Resolution: The Two Henry Dargers

All was soon to be over. Red Mars was slowly passing beyond the horizon and the white star of Peace already shone faintly on the ravaged Glandelinian nation.⁸⁸

While the Aronburg mystery is never fully elucidated or resolved, Darger, as author, makes a number of valiant efforts to tie up the various loose ends, and to bring the situation to an acceptable close. In part, he did this by exploiting the paradoxical fact, hinted at throughout his vast history, that there is more than one Henry Darger loose in *The Realms* (see chapter 5). In the final volume there is actually a surprising number of Dargers participating in the last stages of the war, with Darger's father, Henry senior, and his two uncles, August and Charles, playing an active part as generals in charge of major Christian armies. In fact, "General August Darger in trying to rally this portion of the christian line was killed," an event which takes place in 1916, the year of his actual death.⁸⁹ Frederick Darger also puts in a brief appearance as a boy scout leader.

But far more important than the contribution of the various members of the Darger family is the split which occurs in Henry Darger himself, a clear division into relatively distinct good and bad personalities fighting on opposite sides. Although the existence of two Dargers had been exploited on several occasions during the course of the story, it is nowhere more fully elucidated than at the end, where it is used to resolve the Aronburg situation, by emphasizing the distinct response of the two Dargers to the mystery. In doing this, a third Henry Joseph Darger, the author, plays fast and loose with history, changing facts and inventing personalities and events with wild abandon. The Vivian girls now distinguish the two Dargers without difficulty, though in the past their separate existence was a source of considerable confusion.

Henry Joseph Darger on the side of the christians, the old time Geminie friend of ours, and general Henry Joseph Darger on the side of the Glandelinians. The one on the side of the enemy was equal in fury to our dreaded enemy general Raymond Richardson Federal whom we shot.⁹⁰

This comparison with Federal is of interest in that it hints at psychological affinities between the evil Darger and the supposed killer of Annie Aronburg, though at no time is it suggested that this Darger participated in her murder. The division of Henry Darger into two distinct personalities also conforms quite precisely with a profound defensive split in Darger's psyche, necessitated by the violent and unresolved conflicting forces always present within his soul (see chapter 11). What is

striking is that, even here, where Darger as author was trying valiantly to demonstrate the existence of two distinct Dargers present in *The Realms*, he can't quite pull it off — they overlap, and won't fully come apart — revealing that somewhere within himself he knows they are one. The split, though radical, was only partially successful.

To the end, Darger relished the confusion caused by the presence of two Dargers. Which Darger lost the photograph? To which Darger did the ghost of Annie Aronburg appear? Which Darger is angry with God? The author feels no obligation to be consistent in dealing with these matters; the wonderful irrationality characteristic of purely internal fantasies is everywhere present. As Darger embroiders on the personality of the evil Henry Darger, all sorts of experiences are shifted over to him, and he grows in stature and menace.

"... he was a dangerous raider too," said Violet. "He was more dreaded by the christians than all of the Glandelinian generals put together ... general Henry Darger just used to ride his large cavarly forces around the rear of our christian armies and commit incapable damage everywhere, and start forest fires, that burned hundreds of miles of forests in a few weeks."⁹¹

That the Vivian girls are referring to the evil Darger in the past tense might perhaps be connected with the fact that, a hundred pages earlier, he had been killed in battle. This mortal injury was apparently not fatal, as the Glandelinian

Darger continues to play a part in the war. While the author may have wished to eliminate him, psychologically this was quite impossible, since the light and dark Dargers existed within him, and neither could be destroyed.

At this late stage in the story we are told that it was to this dangerous Darger that the ghost of Annie Aronburg appeared. It was his rage over the lost photograph, and his wish for revenge that led to the onset of the great war, and the dire situation of the Christian armies.

"It may have been a humbug but then she told that general herself who she appeared to in her celestial form that all of it was true and that the war would not be lost if he desisted in his efforts in recovering her picture. And she had not told a lie either. He has not recovered his picture, and we are now besieging the Glandelinian capital but God alone knows whether we will really capture it or not." ...

"Oh josh." said Jennie Turner herself, "I don't believe he wants to recover it. Those notes you read before ["Predictions and Threats"] was good evidence of his disloyalty to Angelinia and Abbieannia. You remember he stated once, as you read, that he had served in the Glandelinian army at Virginia Run and got injured during that battle, and so lost his command as he was unable to serve any longer. And that he threatened the christians all the more for it."⁹²

Given the evil ways of this Darger, a traitor to the Christian cause and an enemy of God, events occurring at the beginning of *The Realms* are now seen in a very different light.

"It is strange indeed that the little celestial sister of yours, Gertrude, had the goodness to appear to him and try to change his wicked ways over his lost. He is not a born Glandelinian at all, his nationality is Abbieannian and so for his service in the Glandelinian army, he makes himself a treacherious traitor. It was mean of the one who made him suffer his heavy loss, but I do not see any reason of becoming such a bitter foe of God over it at all. And as he wrote in one of those notes he shot the one he accused in cold blood a regular assassination."⁹³

"Yes, and it did not benefit him anything either," said Catherine. "As it was later on found the man was not guilty of it at all. He did not do anything at all. His loss was through his own fault. He lived in a house which he never locked up when he went out, and some outsider came in when he was away and cleaned out everything he had. And that serves him right for his carelessness."⁹⁴

At dinner the same night, events surrounding the lost photograph and other articles grow more complex and obscure, as Jack Evans connects these lost articles to their real owner.

"Oh yes, I know about that Glandelinian general," said Evans. "Well he won't serve in the Glandelinian army again, I'm sure. He received a wound at the battle of Virginia Run which makes it impossible for him ever to rejoin the Glandelinian armies again. As for his losses in property, how can he claim that they were his in the first place? Everything depicted that he lost rightly belonged to Geminie Darger who fights on our side, and which he had given to you little girls as presents. This Glandelinian fool [bad Darger] had stolen them from this man [good Darger] himself, and tried to claim they were his right property. General Darger fighting for our side was the real loser not him. But then; that picture always mentioned has never been recovered and probably never will. But I doubt if it really has any effect upon this war. It could not with the way we are progressing now."⁹⁵

It is wonderful to contemplate the moment, so long ago in the staff residence of St. Joseph's Hospital, when the evil Henry Darger stole unseen into the room of the good Henry Darger, to make off with the photograph whose subsequent loss would set the war of *The Realms* in motion. Asked about this loss at the end of the book, the good Henry Darger dismisses it as nothing.

Hanson had learned all about the Aronburg situation, and later during a halt in the fierce pursuit, general Hanson rode up to general Henry Darger and said, "Do you fully know any more of this Aronburg mystery. H? How about the return of the lost photograph? Did you not find it yet?"

"No sir," was general Darger's answer, "and I'm sure that I'll never find it. I've found all of my stolen property but that. The picture amounts to nothing, and neither its loss. All that is necessary is the destruction of the remainder of her murderers."

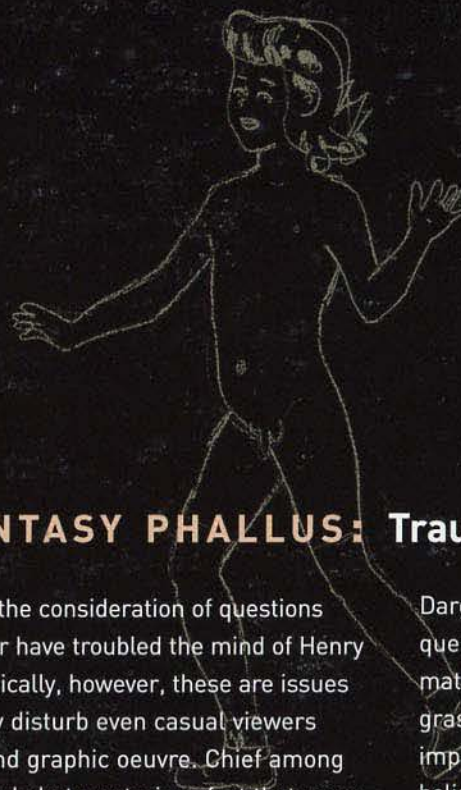
"Well, it is funny that the Aronburg situation has something to do with this national disaster" said general Hanson grimly. "We have progressed so far already but at what a cost. Calverinia almost wiped out, Angelinia disillusioned, and Abbieannia saddened over her own frightful losses ..."⁹⁶

Despite the extreme care with which Darger systematically brings *The Realms* to a close in the final volume, the picture of the murdered Annie Aronburg is never recovered, a simple acknowledgement of the truth. God did not answer his prayers. The photograph was not returned.

10

*Female her form bright as the summer but the parts
of love / Male ...*

—William Blake¹



THE FANTASY PHALLUS: Trauma and Sexual Identity

We now turn to the consideration of questions which may never have troubled the mind of Henry Darger. Paradoxically, however, these are issues which invariably disturb even casual viewers of his written and graphic oeuvre. Chief among these is the simple but mysterious fact that many of the little girls in Darger's pictures possess male genitals. This totally unexpected addition to the anatomy of female children raises a host of all but unresolvable problems concerning

Darger's sexual experience and knowledge, questions about his sexual identity, emotional maturity, intelligence, and, indeed, his overall grasp of reality. For an adult viewer it is all but impossible to imagine that Darger actually believed in the existence of little girls with penises, since this implies an almost inconceivable degree of sexual naiveté and confusion or, alternatively, an astonishingly arbitrary intellectual stance involving a radical denial of reality.

As well, given the current preoccupation with the sexual abuse of children, Darger's obsessional involvement with children, primarily little girls, is almost invariably perceived as disturbing, if not threatening. When extreme physical violence, strangulation, dismemberment, and child murder enter Darger's text and illustrations, as they not infrequently do, the content of his work is readily seen as reflective of severe psychological disturbance. Not surprisingly, questions are commonly raised concerning the possibility that Darger may himself have been the victim of traumatic sexual assault or sadistic physical violence in childhood.

So complex are the psychological issues raised by the strangely altered reality evident throughout Darger's written and graphic creation that two chapters are now to be devoted to an examination of their nature and implications. In the present chapter we will consider questions relating to gender and sexual identity, coming to grips with what is known in psychoanalytic circles as the "fantasy phallus."¹ In the following chapter we will examine far more disturbing issues having to do with sadism and sexualized violence, examining Darger's obsessional preoccupation with the torture and murder of children, and we will do so in the context of the pathological fantasies of the serial killer.

Concerning Darger's sexual life and feelings, we know nothing and everything. Absolutely no firm evidence exists to indicate that he had any sexual experience, any erotic contact with another human being.² His involvement beginning in early childhood with autoerotic practices is, on the other hand, firmly documented. He almost never referred

in his writings to overtly sexual matters, to specifically erotic experiences in himself or others. Any reference to sexual activity, in the narrow sense that he understood it, seems to have been forbidden to him. The rare sexual scenes which do occur in his writings are obscured by what appears to be a considerable amount of confusion and ignorance concerning the basic facts of human physical intimacy and reproduction. Given his seeming failure to develop emotionally and socially, and his extreme inability to tolerate even superficial closeness with others, it is generally assumed by those who knew him that at least in later life he had no sexual experience whatever. In light of the fact that his sexual fantasies seem to have focused exclusively on little girls, it is probably fortunate that his erotic life appears to have found expression entirely in daydreams and in his art.³

As we have already seen, Darger's emotional involvement with little girls extended far beyond the sexual realm, reaching into every corner of his life and his identity. His worship of idealized female children underlies *In the Realms of the Unreal* in every aspect, embodying a vast range of symbolic meaning and emotional significance. It appears likely that his ability to relate to actual children would have been extremely limited; only in *The Realms* and in fantasy could he come close to imagined and idealized little girls.⁴ Even the most fully realized of these, the Vivian sisters, lack much in the way of personality, remaining undifferentiated and impersonal multiples of each other. Only one child seems to have preoccupied Darger as a distinct individual with whom he was involved at least in fantasy, Annie Aronburg, and she died shortly after *The Realms* began.

Beauty and Sexuality in *The Realms*

Darger's repeated and elaborate descriptions of the physical beauty and perfection of the Vivian girls betray the extent of his compulsive attraction to female children as sexual objects. His insistence on their supernatural and disturbing loveliness, and the awe it inspires in him and others, actually seems calculated to distance him from these celestial children. Only through his identification with the boy heroes, Penrod and Jack Evans, is any real intimacy with, and affection for them possible, even in fantasy. However, as we move from these celestial beings and their friends, to the more normal children who inhabit *The Realms*, especially children in those areas where child slavery is practiced, all inhibition is removed, and the children's bodies become the focus of intense awareness and desire. In both the written descriptions of these children, and in the pictorial illustrations, Darger finds all manner of excuses to justify removing their clothes.

Among themselves, his innocent children, including the Vivian girls, feel no reluctance about shedding their garments and cavorting unselfconsciously as part of the natural world. In many of the collage-drawings, and particularly the series of large depictions of children in gardens (10.1), the display of naked little bodies seems to reflect a state of uncontrived and quite genuine innocence on the part of the artist. In responding to these scenes of naked children at play, we are probably justified in laying aside any suspicions we may have, realizing the extent to which the split in Darger's psyche protected him. While there is, unmistakably, a sensual element in these flower-filled scenes,



10.1

Henry Darger

151 At Jennie Richee. Are lost in the wilderness in the dark.

Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper.

60 x 276 cm. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. Inv. 9446 (verso).

©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

it is entirely that of pre-adolescence, and Darger seems to have been able to participate in it vicariously with the uninhibited innocence of a boy.⁵

Although Darger did not grow up with a sister, he often imagines situations of intimacy between siblings. He is aware that between brothers and sisters forms of closeness are permitted which would not be permissible with strangers. Penrod, who for most of the story is not related to the Vivian girls, scrupulously observes the standards of decency appropriate between a gentleman and his young lady friends. "At night Penrod slept in a separate tent, for it would not be polite for boys to sleep with girls, though of course in Angelinia that is usually done more than ever in this country."⁶

In the ideal imaginary world which Darger was creating, in which innocence and Christian modesty prevail, children might occasionally share the same room or even the same bed. In the unusual conditions of war, situations occasionally arise in *The Realms* which demand the transgression of society's ethical standards. But Darger is very tentative in the writing of such scenes, moments in which desire merges with inhibition, and in which rich fantasy blossoms in the night.

ONE OF THE MOST delightful incidents in the story brings Penrod and Violet Vivian together in a situation of unexpected closeness: indeed, to start with, they are locked together with a pair of handcuffs. Fighting with the evil boy scout Gerald Starring, they fall from a railway bridge, landing in a barrel of hay.

When at last Penrod was able to breathe again, he found that Starring had disappeared, and Violet lying senseless by him still handcuffed to him. He gasped out an

inquiry regarding whether she was injured or not ... but he received no reply from her. For when those three fighting youngsters landed, their heads that is Penrod's and Violet's had rapped together like a pair of coconuts, dazing him and cutting him on the forehead and knocking her completely out and now she lay senseless and inert across him her slender arm still manacled to his right arm and doubled under her body. "The fiend," he hissed through his clenched teeth, "if ever I meet him alone I'll ..." He contrived to flounder upright buried to his knees in the mouldy marsh hay. Then he carefully seated himself, drew her left arm carefully from under her, and let her sink back against his shoulder.⁷

Darger now sets the scene for a brief romantic interlude, a rare moment of sexual fantasy which quickly gets out of hand. Having unlocked the handcuffs, Penrod carries the unconscious Violet back to the waiting train. Conveniently, "The porter had made up their both berths of their section."

Penrod laid Violet on the gray blankets of the berth, and placed two soft pillows under her head, which still wore the saucy little hat with its tiny blue blossoms. He thought to himself, there was only one thing to do to such a dangerous youngster when he met with him again and that was to shoot him on sight. It was impossible to capture him alive, and he ought to have known that.

As he thought he saw blood, and as no one was around he grew nervous. He hesitated, and his boyish face was very red; and his head hands unsteady, as with

"I can't help it dear God its got to be done," he drew off her shoes, her garters and stockings, her hat and her jacket, full of burs and hay. But he by this time had almost himself become afraid of the resourceful and dangerous young Glandelinian boy scout and he decided to get Violet out of the way before it was too late. To see whether she was wounded or not he was Heaven knows he had to do it compelled to almost undress her entirely with the prudent view of making sure that she was not hurt. At last, horribly embarrassed, he had succeeded but found the blood must have come from Starring, which it did the latter having received a bloody nose in his fall. He replaced her clothing, then he pulled the sheets and blankets over her, went to his seat and placed the valises in the upper berth out of reach. Then he took out her pocket book which he drew from her pocket a tiny crystal flask of hartshorn which he had noticed there, and which he now thrust under her pretty nose. The girl's reaction was so prompt and Violet or violent that it scared him, for she gave a terrific sneeze, and sat bolt upright, at first regarding him with a wild surmise.

"Penrod," she gasped, "What the — where am I?"

"I brought you back into the car," he said. "We had a bad fall but you are not hurt." It was however nearly a minute before she fully realized where she was, and what outrageous condition she had missed being in. He now got her to lay down, politely pulling up the blankets

around her throat for she was only partly undressed, and was making soothing and timid inquiries, when suddenly the full purport of what had happened overwhelmed the little girl — and he saw hell flaming in her pretty eyes.

"I hope you didn't mind, I had to undress you to see if you were hurt?" he faltered. She shook her head as if to say "No".

"I — I had to do it, he faltered, "I saw blood on you and thought he had slashed you."

"It's alright, Penrod" she gasped. "But the villain escaped did he?"

"Yes. He almost knocked me out too." Impotent fury bowed her head with its tossed little golden curls and she buried her scarlet face in both hands.⁸

In what is unmistakably the sexual fantasy of a little boy, Darger imagines undressing an unconscious little girl. Overwhelmed with desire and confusion, he seems all but unconscious himself, suppressing the impact of what he sees with violent thoughts of "the other," the wicked Glandelinian boy scout Gerald Starring. So confusing is this passage that it is almost as if, having violated the child, he considers "getting her out of the way before it is too late." But then, "horribly embarrassed," he replaces some of her clothing and covers her with the blankets. Both Penrod and Darger seem unusually confused, indeed guilty, about what has occurred. Penrod continues to muse over the incident, returning to his actions again and again in fantasy.

Standing by the window looking out, Penrod watched the red glow of the lantern receding through the night, until it became a tiny distant spark and vanished in misty

obscurity. Then he changed his seat to one opposite the birth where Violet lay, placing his two revolvers by his side nearest the window pulled the shade down and prepared to be on the watch. He was so excited he couldn't sleep if he tried to do his best on that matter ...

"What a little scoundrel. Oh no, he wasn't exactly that either. He was worse. What a little fiend. It was a cowardly, shameful, dastardly, unprincipled thing to do." And Poor Penrod had been forced to almost undress her because he was so crazed with desperation when he saw the blood on her clothes and couldn't find the supposed wound. But what's the difference if she took him for a brother. Surely Heaven knows there was no wrong, no immodesty in a thing necessary. And how embarrassed he was that he had to do it. Only desperation drove him to her for fear of finding Starring might have gave her a fatal wound as he always slashes with a dangerous knife at close quarters. He remembered Gertrude's experience with him in that barn and that drove him desperate at the sight of blood. Therefore there was no [dis]respect. Brothers and sisters often bath at home together in the same tub everywhere and what is that ...

And because Penrod is so good to her and her sisters and risked so much she loved him equally as she loved her country and parents and sisters, and there was not the slightest doubt that for him only God came first and she and country next.

"What a brute of a Starring." she whispered to Penrod. "My head feels so sore that I wonder if I can sleep."

[...]

Penrod looked at his wrist watch. It was exactly ten oclock. It was supposed to be midnight when the train would stop at Henriettatown. Only two hours sleep for Violet.

"Better try and get some sleep while you can" he whispered. "I'll hold you close to me so no one can grab you away in case they try. I won't sleep. I can't."

This passage illustrates beautifully the defensive mechanisms of projection and splitting, at the very moment when they are occurring. With its references to the excitement engendered by blood, and thoughts of the "supposed wound," it raises crucial issues which are profoundly relevant to the discussion of sexualized violence in chapter 11.¹⁰

THAT HENRY was fully conscious, at least on occasion, of the intense erotic feelings that could be awakened by naked female children is made uniquely evident by a shockingly unexpected passage in *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.¹¹ Catherine Vivian is falsely accused of a serious moral lapse. We are informed that on the night before taking Communion she chose to appear:

... in that big vaudeville show on Halsted street. She danced the highland fling on the stage with no clothes on at all; with a strong light revealing her every motion. During intermission she allowed naked boys to crowd around her, to take her into their arms, to sit on their laps, and so on.¹²

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Although the accusation is later proven to be completely false, it serves to reveal certain aspects of Darger's own erotic imagination, as well as the rage provoked in him by what he seems to feel is the seductive activity of little girls. Nowhere in *The Realms* does he allow his own desire to reveal itself so overtly. But this too is the sexual fantasy of a naive boy, and not to be confused with the violent and perverse sexual behavior of the Glandelinian adults. Darger's response to the idea of seductive exhibitionism is shock and moral outrage.

It appears that he views all sexual activity as morally wrong. Even to write of sexual happenings is not permissible. It is perhaps for this reason that *The Realms* contains almost no references to conventional sexual activities. No matter what tortures are imposed on their child victims by the Glandelinians, no bodily orifice is ever penetrated, or even referred to, and no explicitly sexual act occurs. Specifically sexual touching is never mentioned, and intercourse is unheard of. It is for this reason that the accusations directed against Catherine Vivian come as such a surprise. "Allowing naked boys to do fornication acts with her while still naked."¹³ Is it possible that Darger understood the meaning of this accusation and of this term? Are we perhaps overestimating the extent of his innocence?

Gender and Disguise

Throughout *The Realms* there is a strange fluidity of gender. Darger uses disguise to turn little girls into little boys, and the other way around. These short- or long-term sex changes are reflective both of intense curiosity and of deep confusion about the differences between the sexes.

Indeed all these thoughts were rolling and seething in Gertrude's breast, as she was pensively leaning her pretty head on her hand, watching Jennie Turner as she was adapting to her slender and pretty little form a little boy's attire, in which it was deemed safest she should make her escape to the christian army, under the Emperor.

"Now for the needed sacrifice," said she as she stood before a looking glass, and shook down her silky abundance of golden curly hair. "I say Gertrude, it is a pity too," said she as she held up some of it almost wistfully. "Pity so much of it has got to come off."

Gertrude smiled sadly, but did not answer. Jennie turned to the glass, and the scissors glittered as one long lock after another was detached so that she wore now short bobbed hair. "There now, that will do," she said, taking up a hair brush. "Now for a few fancy touches. There Gertrude, ain't I a pretty young boy?" she said turning around to Angelina Aronburg, laughing and blushing at the same time. "Now I can be your loving boy friend all the way."

"You always will be pretty do what you will," said Gertrude ... "You look like a

pretty little fellow indeed. That crop of short bobbed hair is quite becoming. Put on your little cap. So ... a little to one side. I never saw quite so pretty a boy. But its almost time for our disguised escort. I wonder if the general himself has got the little boy rigged? Why even now I don't know the little lad's name."

Just at this moment the tent entrance was thrust aside, and general Aronburg himself entered, leading the little boy dressed in girl's clothing ...

"What a pretty girl he sure would make," said Jennie, turning him around ... The child stood gravely, regarding the two girls in their new and strange attire, observing a profound silence, and occasionally drawing deep sighs, and peeing at them timidly from under his long dark curls.

"Here, how is it the boy puts on a coat, Gertrude? This is my first experience in a boy's full attire." "You must wear it so," said Gertrude, putting on the coat. "So then," said Jennie, imitating the motion several times so she would remember. "And I must stamp and take long steps like a boy, and look saucy." "Don't exert yourself too much on that," said Gertrude. "There is now and then sissy young boys who act like girls you know, and I think therefore it would be better and easier to act like a boy who is in the class of sissies."

This scene, one of many dealing with disguise, is unique in presenting Darger playing freely with the various possibilities of sexual transformation, in terms of both illusion and reality. It also makes evident his obsessional interest in hair as the essential bodily feature permitting one to distinguish

one sex from the other. The preoccupation with little girls' hair is apparent in the writings, but it is in the drawings that the full extent of his obsession is revealed. In the repeated tracing copies employed in the collage-drawings, he frequently changes a child's hair style so as to suggest different children despite the fact that the model used remains the same. He invented new hair styles, and also changed the hair color of specific models. Although blond hair is not restricted to the Vivian girls, it is the essential factor allowing us to identify them in pictures. He was obviously partial to children with blond hair, but it is in his drawings of girls with black hair that he reveals an intensity of involvement that is truly compulsive. On occasion he became involved in an obviously excessive shading and elaboration of black hair, with intense pressure used to produce shiny black surfaces. His excitement and perhaps anxiety are very evident.¹⁴

His intense preoccupation with girls' hair becomes of particular concern when we realize that hair was the only bodily feature permitting him, in reality, to truly distinguish boys from girls. In the drawings, the rare little boys are distinguished by their short hair and by their clothes. In the text they are also distinguished by being less pretty.

Darger delighted in the playful manipulation of gender. We have already met the unusual hair styles, "like little girls, bobbed or the other various ways," of a horrifyingly violent troop of adult Glandelinian soldiers. After these strange-looking soldiers annihilate an entire Christian army in battle, Darger comments: "The whole christian center was forced, and the christian batteries were in possession of the imitation little girls."¹⁵

Another essential element of disguise was the shift to clothing of the opposite sex. As we will see later, this was to be a matter of intense concern to Darger in later years when adults wearing the clothes of the opposite sex made him anxious and angry. With children it provided playful possibilities of changing sexual identity, as well as political affiliation, with the goal of confusing the enemy. Significantly, a form of punishment regularly used at the Lincoln Asylum during Henry's years there was to dress the boys in girls clothing if they were bad.¹⁶

The final factor permitting gender change was to adopt a different, more boyish or masculine manner. The Vivian girls are presented as experts at disguise able to mimic exactly, despite their radiant beauty, the behavior of boys. The relative failure of Jennie, in the passage quoted above, to imitate a real boy is not of great concern because of the existence of a special class of boys, "sissy boys." These boys are described as too pretty, and they behave in less masculine ways. At this point we move from illusion to reality, as we are introduced to such a boy now disguised as a girl.

It is worthy of comment that it is the adult General Aronburg who undertakes to transform this little boy into a pretty little girl, a change which seems to disturb and trouble the child. This change from boy to girl seems superficially to be of far less interest to Darger, who says little about how it is accomplished. However, the slip which causes the boy to urinate in his anxiety reveals the intensity of Darger's unconscious involvement in this unwilling sex change. One wonders whether Darger may have been a sissy boy in childhood, despite all his assurances in *The History of My Life* to the

contrary. Certainly his lifelong need to disappear with great regularity into a world dominated by little girls suggests that emotionally he was still a little boy who wished to play with girls. In this context, the fact that Gertrude does not know the little boy's name assumes unusual significance. Given the fact that Darger didn't know his mother's name, or that of the sister he never saw, one might be inclined to suggest that the anonymous little boy being disguised as a girl is Darger himself.

THERE ARE A NUMBER of gender changes in *The Realms* which, though accomplished through disguise, endure for much of the story. The most important of these is undoubtedly Penrod's friend the Rattlesnake Boy who, as we have seen, turned out to be a sister of Annie and Angelina Aronburg. When we first meet Radcliffe he is a boy's boy, and the ever present companion of Penrod. From the start, however, Darger hints at something odd about him. Later, evidence begins to accumulate that he is, in fact, a girl in disguise.

The strange boy scout called Radcliffe, who had followed Penrod and others into the Glandelinian camp to also aid Violet and her sisters in their unusual quest, seemed to the enemy and those who knew him to lead a new or a double life. Many rebel officers seemed suspicious, and even afraid of him, and when someone saw him looking at them, they walked away, or mumbled, and mounting their horses rode off ...

Like all the other well known boy scouts in the christian lines, he was also always successful in his missions. He still retained his darkly Abbieannian complexioned

face, girlish features, and a Celtic Romanic one at that, large searching eyes, pugnacious eyebrows, and the same air of solemnity and dignity, which often lead Violet and her sisters to think that he would in time qualify as an exceptionally dangerous undertaker — for the enemy who did not keep out of his way ... Under his strangely golden hair which was bobbed long, like that of a girl, he wore an expression, for which vacancy is a word sadly inadequate, and make them think Radcliffe was a "wild cat" girl in disguise. And he could wrestle successfully with any boy scout, lick any in a boxing match, and out do them in anything ...

At least there was something queer about Radcliffe ... Violet and her sisters in their clever and shrewd way tried to discover in every possible manner his sense of any of nature, and of who he really was. From day to day they plied him with questions ...

"Radcliffe, my boy, you are just the lad we need. From what we observe in you, you are leading a double life, for to us you sometimes seem to be a girl scout disguised as a boy, which we are keeping strictly secret, as we almost recognize you as one of Angelinia Aronburg's sisters."¹⁷

Darger has been extremely skillful in misleading the reader, while maintaining an air of mystery around the Rattlesnake Boy. Now that his real identity is about to be revealed, we learn that the Vivian girls have been suspicious all along. Even the rebel soldiers seem unnerved by this strange foe, though no one can doubt his ability or tough-

ness, and his capacity to function as a leader among the boy scouts. Only a certain feminine beauty seems to betray the fact that he is a girl, though a special "wild cat" girl, in disguise. It is General Aronburg himself who finally reveals the secret that Radcliffe is actually his niece Angelinia Aronburg's lost sister (see chapter 9).

IT SEEMS TO BE a matter of great importance to Henry that at least some children have the ability to change gender, or to slip in and out of disguises which fool everyone. There is an obvious pleasure in moving about incognito, free of the limitations of one's sexual identity. But, the confusion seems to extend beyond disguise. At one point in the story, the Christian camp is troubled by a series of "duplicate Angelinia Aronburgs."

"We have captured five or six duplicates of Gertrude Angeline in our own lines ... It's a grave offence for anyone to duplicate any of us ..."

"Three or four duplicates of Gertrude Angeline are here seeking information about us ... The duplicates are suspected, and perhaps accused, as being here as spies, and that it'll be hard to find out the original Angelinia Aronburg ... If you girls and boys could, despite disguises, recognize the original one, then you are lucky. We can't tell head or tails between the prisoners as they're twins in the business, though they appear by the tone of their voices to be boys in disguise ... My orders are to detain these doubles of Angelinia Aronburg unless any of you can recognize the original."¹⁸

Rank confusion arises in distinguishing between the duplicates, despite the fact that several of them are boys in disguise.

"We have one of those duplicates here" said the camp fire girl. "We will have him ushered in here and hear what he has to say for himself. Some one of my girl scouts captured him." "Him?" "Yes, him." declared the campfire girl. "He's disguised himself as Gertrude, and with that wig appeared her likeness. Had not the captors seized the wig no one would have never known." ... In a moment the exact duplicate of Angelinia Aronburg was brought into the room."¹⁹

Clearly, Darger is having a wonderful time playing with all the variations on the theme of gender and disguise. Later in life he was less playful when faced with similar confusion in reality.

SOMETIME in the latter part of 1965, when he was past seventy, Darger wrote a letter to the priests at St. Vincent de Paul church. The letter is lost, but a reply from Father Thomas Murphy survives. He responded, in excessive detail, to Darger's concern that women wearing men's clothing are acting contrary to moral law.

Nov 19, 1965

Mr. Henry J. Dargarus:

Dear sir:

Deuteronomy chapter 22, verse 5: "A woman must not wear man's clothing, or a man go clad like a woman; all such things are hateful to God."

Yes, this is still God's law. Now what was the Sacred Writer referring to? Those who are learned in the Holy Scriptures, tell us that what is forbidden is the wearing of these clothes so as to pass oneself off as a member of the opposite sex, so that they

might lead one of their own sex to commit a sin of impurity with them. This is called the unnatural sin of sodomy. Now since you recognize these females, as women or girls, they apparently are not trying to pass themselves off as one of the opposite sex.

The letter then goes on to explain in terms of fashion or poverty why a woman might occasionally adopt an article of clothing usually associated with the opposite sex. The letter is only of interest in revealing the extent to which Darger at the end of his life had changed. Having become intensely devout, even moralistic, he could no longer tolerate playful sexual transformations or uncertainty in the area of gender. That the new fashions provoked anxiety and anger in him suggests that at a deeper level his confusion about sexual differences and identity continued unchanged, as did the extreme concreteness or literalness of his thinking.

The Fantasy Phallus

We must now turn to that aspect of Darger's reality, as reflected in his pictorial art, in which sexual confusion and literalness of thought assume extreme proportions, challenging our ability to understand: the simple fact that little girls when depicted in the collage-drawings frequently possess male genitals. This surprising anatomical detail is most commonly visible in the many drawings in which the children appear "nuded."²⁰ However, it also occurs on occasion when the children's clothing is depicted as transparent, with the genitals clearly visible through the fabric of the dresses. Although the structure of the male organ is very clearly defined whenever it appears, with penis and testicles carefully drawn, it never seems to be exaggeratedly emphasized, appearing rather as a perfectly natural aspect of the bodily form of little girls. On the very rare occasion that little boys appear in the drawings naked, they too possess appropriate small male genitals. The Vivian girls are in no way different from other children in this respect: when they are "denuded," they too are seen to be equipped with male genitals. The same is true of those Blengiglomenean serpents which have a child's body. Along with wings, horns, and tail, they also possess the necessary male organ. We are, therefore, forced to assume that at some level of his reality Darger believed that female children are equipped with male genitals.

Because of the nature of Darger's drawing technique, with its dependence on the tracing of previously existing images, the reality of this anatomical fact is emphasized for us, since we are aware that in every case the genitals had to be added by Darger. Carefully eliminating clothes from

his small models he then ceased tracing long enough to add the required genital organs free-hand (see illustration 3.48). In the historical period when these drawings were being made, naked female children with visible genitals were never depicted in any medium. There was, therefore, never an occasion on which Darger was forced to substitute one form of genitals for another. None of his graphic source material would ever have challenged his unique view of reality.

It is, of course, possible to question whether what we are encountering was, in fact, an aspect of Darger's reality. Given the fact that he is depicting the Realms of the Unreal, is it not possible that this is simply an artistic conceit, a playful but perfectly conscious manipulation of nature or anatomy? While it is not possible to know precisely what Darger believed, it seems unlikely that he would have felt comfortable playing about with sexual facts in this way. It is also significant that he never makes reference to this, to us, astonishing biological fact anywhere in his writings. The word penis, or any of the numerous popular synonyms, is never used, and this body part is, accordingly, never referred to. Had he intended this transformation to be a special and unique feature of *The Realms*, he would undoubtedly have offered some explanation for it. It is we who are left to grapple with a massive problem which to Darger was no problem at all but a simple fact of nature: female children, like male children, possess a penis and testicles.

If we had only the pictures, and no accompanying text, it might be conceivable to raise the possibility that these were little boys with long hair, rather than little girls with penises, a far less radical state of affairs. The fact that they wear dresses might

be seen as evidence of transvestism in children, which is not unknown.²¹ However, the fact that these children are girls and not boys is made evident on every page of *The Realms*. When drawing these children and adding penises to their naked forms he very clearly intended to represent little girls. Quite frequently they are identified by names inscribed on the drawings.

For the average viewer, it is the fact of the phallus which is, unavoidably, the overwhelming sexual characteristic.²² As a result, questions are raised concerning a possible homosexual fixation. This possibility will be examined in another connection, but it is essentially overruled by the fact that Darger's sexual object seems invariably to have been a female child. His lack of interest in boys is more than apparent in the drawings, as in the texts.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that not all little girls depicted in the drawings possess genitals. While no child in Darger's drawings possesses female genitals, many children appear with no genital organ indicated. This omission occurs sufficiently often, with both possibilities frequently seen in a single picture, as to cause some viewers to conclude that only some female children have male genitals. Because of the extremely irrational nature of this problem, which awakens profound anxiety and emotional disturbance in many viewers, there is a natural tendency to avoid the incomprehensible by attempting to deny its reality or its omnipresence.

Careful study of hundreds, indeed thousands, of Darger's children, reveals two distinct situations in which male genitals are omitted. In general, and in the large majority of cases, when a child's

legs are close together the genitals are not depicted. This is also true of children seen in profile. Though this is by no means always true, it is generally the case. It is those children who are depicted frontally, with their legs spread widely apart, who almost invariably display their male genitals.²³ As a result, in any one drawing, several children will be depicted standing frontally with legs together, and no genitals; while others, involved in more extreme movement, will have their legs apart, for example when running, and the genitals will be readily visible. Darger draws these genitals with absolute naturalness, with no hint of exaggeration or overemphasis. Only in the rare case of genitals visible through clothing do questions arise concerning a strange overemphasis on what would otherwise be invisible genitals.²⁴

The second situation in which no genitals of any kind appear is more problematic. On occasion, Darger drew pictures featuring a host of "nuded" children of various sizes and ages, in which the genitals were simply not depicted at all (see illustration 11.1). In such pictures none of the children, no matter what their pose or position, possess sexual organs. In these images moral considerations appear to triumph over a more open and literal treatment of nudity. Was he more aware on certain occasions of trespassing against a moral and legal code which tended to frown on the depiction of naked children? As we have seen, it is very possible that the need to have photographic enlargements made brought him into conflict with outside reality. Significantly, it is in the unusually large images of naked children that the genitals are often omitted. It seems that on occasion he felt inhibited in depicting the children's genitals, particularly if they would have been unusually large.

But, if so, why did he normally feel so unconcerned about depicting naked children in nature with male genitals clearly defined?

THE SIMPLE FACT seems to be that at some level of his reality and experience, Darger believed that little girls were no different in this respect than little boys: All children possess male genitals, although these genitals are not always visible. Since he never depicted adults without clothing (and seldom drew women at all), we can say nothing concerning his beliefs about the anatomy of adults. Finally, it should be mentioned that the phenomenon of erection is never depicted, although the penis is often drawn "flipped up," as a result of violent movement — running or jumping. As in the texts, the genitals are never a focus of attention, and nothing is ever done to or with the penis. Left to themselves, the children seem blissfully unaware of each other's sexuality, innocently unconcerned about being "bare." On no occasion does Darger ever depict the female genitalia. None of the nude figures shown without male genitals ever reveals another possibility. Female genitals are notable only for their absence. We must consider the possibility that he did not know of their existence. Since we only possess visual information concerning children, we can say nothing at all about his beliefs concerning the anatomy of adult women.

No matter how extreme the sadistic tendencies of the Glandelinians become, there is never so much as a suggestion that they concern themselves with, or interfere with, the children's genitals. Though the bodies of female children are constantly penetrated by various weapons, this is invariably accomplished by cutting open the abdomen or

chest cavity, never by the penetration of bodily openings, with the occasional exception of the mouth. In 15,000 pages of text, there is no overt reference to sexual intercourse or any other sexual act involving the genitals, male or female.

It is necessary to consider, not only that Darger was unaware of the female genitals, but that the entire range of facts and activities connected with human reproduction were unknown to him. No reference to pregnancy or the birth of children occurs in *The Realms*. Adoption is the only means of obtaining children Darger ever refers to. Because Darger's essential involvement is almost exclusively with young girls, as opposed to women, none of these more advanced aspects of human development are even relevant. Given the nature of the story these omissions are hardly noticeable, unless one is attuned to omissions. However, once one becomes aware of the wide range of human experience not dealt with in *The Realms*, or Darger's other writings, it becomes apparent that here too there was a split in the ego which systematically isolated him from aspects of human experience he could not deal with. The sudden disappearance of his mother, and her almost total absence from his memory, is paralleled by the almost complete absence of women from *The Realms*.²⁵ Similarly, the purely imaginary presence of his lost and idealized sister in his mind is reflected in the no less imaginary image of little girls and their sexual identity in his art.

BECAUSE OF the enormity of these strange discrepancies in the context of an adult personality, it is unavoidable that we confront psychological questions having to do with the nature of belief and experience, delusion and reality. Darger's unique

conception of sexuality and anatomy profoundly challenges our own capacity to believe. We are forced either to deny the reality of what we see in his art, to treat it as an occasion for nervous humor and jokes, or to attempt to come to grips on a more serious level with what are truly massive, indeed astonishing, gaps in his understanding of the world.

On the simplest level it is not absolutely impossible that Darger's erroneous view of the most basic facts of human reality stems entirely from lack of experience. Given the nature of his life, and the historical period in which he lived, it is easily within the realm of possibility that he never saw a naked woman or girl, even a baby girl. Because of the tenuous and superficial nature of his contacts with women, after the age of four, an opportunity for verifying the essential differences between the sexes for himself may not have been available to him. Clearly, he knew well before four that there were two distinct sexes in the world, readily distinguishable because of differences in hair, dress, and behavior. Living alone with his father, then in a home for boys, and finally in an asylum for feeble-minded children in which boys and girls were strictly segregated, he may never have seen female genitals.

However, it seems highly unlikely that he would not have learned, at least intellectually, of anatomical differences. By no means all the adolescent boys in the Lincoln Asylum were severely retarded. Darger was grouped with the better-functioning boys in the Main Building. He was sent with the more functional teenagers to work on the asylum farm in the summer. In such a situation he would undoubtedly have heard a range of facts, inevitably mixed with error, concerning female anatomy and

human reproduction.²⁶ Possibly the farm animals, which included cows and sheep, would have provided an opportunity for direct perceptual experience of the differences between the sexes, and perhaps even impressive experiences of conception and birth in the animal world. In later life, because of his deeply withdrawn nature, the possibility of actual experience may well have been far more limited.²⁷ In the absence of any sexual contact, Darger may have been able to maintain his innocent conception of children's anatomy, while ignoring that of adults, other than himself.

The biography of the Victorian artist and critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) provides an interesting parallel. Ruskin is said to have been so severely traumatized on his wedding night by the discovery that his bride possessed a radically different genital anatomy that he was unable to perform the sexual act either then or on any other occasion. In the absence of prior information or experience, the discovery of the missing or "mutilated" genitals may well have been traumatic indeed, terrifying rather than exciting. Here too, we might wish to question the nature of Ruskin's "not knowing," while acknowledging the possibility that he had never actually seen a naked female of any age.

While it seems unlikely that Darger was completely unaware, at some level of consciousness, that girls differ from boys in not possessing male genitals, it seems far more probable that he had no clear understanding of what they do possess. It is easily possible that he never saw the female genitals, even in a child. As we move back into the nineteenth century such a situation becomes increasingly possible, at least for certain social classes, and in families with no female children.

For this reason, while it is very difficult to imagine, it is not impossible to maintain that Darger suffered from ignorance and lack of experience, rather than delusion and psychosis.

Psychoanalytic Approaches: Knowing and Not Knowing²⁸

Having examined this simplest of possibilities, we must now turn to more complex forms of "not knowing," illusions and gaps in knowledge which are unconsciously maintained only with the expenditure of considerable psychic energy. In such situations of not knowing, the truth has a way of breaking through in disguised forms. In Darger's case knowing and not knowing seem at times to alternate with the rapidity of a child playing peek-a-boo, now you see it now you don't. In looking at those little girls who possess no penis because their legs are pressed together, one is reminded of another childhood game played by little boys, that of hiding their genitals by tucking them back between their tightly compressed legs. For older boys this is a conscious allusion to the missing organ in girls, and an occasion of masculine humor and celebration. In younger children it may serve as an explanation for why the organ is not visible in girls. Other explanations accounting for its absence are: "It is small now, but it will grow."²⁹ Obviously, other possibilities are too frightening to contemplate. With Darger, the regular appearance and disappearance of the penis in his drawings may reflect an unconscious playing with levels of reality, a daring approach and retreat from the truth, which he both knows and does not know. If so, while this game may have originated in childhood it persisted to the end of his life. The pictorial

evidence we are exploring belongs, after all, largely to the years from his mid-fifties into his seventies. Nevertheless, it appears likely that this belief in what we will call the "fantasy phallus" originated in his early childhood, perhaps initially in connection with the sister whose name he did not know, and who he had never seen. Is his insistence that he had never *seen* her perhaps significant?

At this point in our examination of what is obviously extremely unusual material, it becomes necessary to begin to make use of insights derived from psychoanalysis and, in particular, from the psychoanalytic study of children. What is intended is not the gratuitous introduction of psychological theory, but rather a thoughtful response to otherwise inexplicable images and beliefs. A psychoanalytic approach is literally demanded by the unique and puzzling images we are encountering.

Within psychoanalysis concepts derived from young children's belief in the existence of an imaginary female phallus, and of a "phallic mother," have received considerable attention and elaboration.³⁰ The simple fact is that images and ideas centering on this illusory penis are commonly encountered in the fantasies, and in the beliefs, of perfectly normal children at a certain point in their development. Freud first drew attention to this phenomenon in 1909 in his discussion of the case of "Little Hans," who believed for a time that his mother, and subsequently his sister, were possessed of penises.³¹ Freud indicated that this delusional belief, which is maintained in the face of direct observation, is massively influenced by the discovery of the difference between the sexes, and by anxiety concerning castration that this discovery initially provokes in both sexes.³² The discovery, however

it occurs, of a missing body part invariably and understandably evokes fears of mutilation and of violent attack. The reader would do well to pause here to consider the inevitable assumptions and fantasies which arise when we encounter an individual with one hand missing. Clearly, something terrifying has happened to cause this member to be cut away from the body. The person, having been mutilated, inspires sympathy and feelings of superiority, because he is now different from all other people. One would expect no less in encountering a person whose penis has been amputated.

One way open to the child of responding to such a threatening discovery is to "deny" the reality of what has been seen, while repressing, at least temporarily, all memory of what has been learned. Anna Freud points out:

*Examples of the excessive use of the method of denial of outer reality can be found when the child is confronted with the facts of the difference between the sexes ... Under the pressure of painful emotions the ego waives reality testing, pretends to see what is not there ... or ignores what is in plain view.*³³

In place of the missing organ, the child constructs the fantasy of a female phallus to protect himself from the terrible possibility of a penis-less, damaged person, and from fears concerning the danger to which his own penis may be exposed.³⁴ He is encouraged in inventing this imaginary organ by its presence in his mind at a still earlier phase, when the existence of his mother's penis was based on a natural and unconsidered assumption derived from identification.

Later this delusion is clung to desperately in spite of evidence to the contrary. It is at this stage that the illusory phallus can take on magical and dangerous properties, becoming both reassuring and threatening, with mother now a source of both comfort and danger. The child has moved from a simple assumption of wholeness, in which the penis possesses no more significance than the fingers and toes, to a delusional belief in a fantasy penis, and a highly charged need not to know. To maintain this belief, in the face of experience, involves the expenditure of enormous psychic energy. As a result, in most children the belief in a female penis is abandoned fairly quickly, as they yield, however reluctantly, to the evidence of their senses. By coming to grips with reality, they embark on the road which leads, over time, to discovering the true nature of the female genitalia. Despite its frightening aspect, it is only the discovery that mother lacks this important organ that allows the boy's still feeble masculinity to begin to develop. During this phase, the illusory penis may also fend off the necessity of recognizing the existence and mysterious nature of the vagina, and its part in the process of giving birth. This final mystery is never fully resolved, since even in adult males the sense of awe associated with women's power to create and house new life is comprehended largely by an act of imagination and belief, in the absence of real understanding. Nevertheless, in the majority of males, despite the persistence of some degree of castration anxiety, belief in the existence of the woman with a penis is abandoned.

There are, however, important exceptions to this normal pattern, and in a significant number of possible variations of sexual development (the so-called perversions), belief in the female phallus remains firmly entrenched in the unconscious, influencing sexual desire and behavior in a variety of ways.³⁵ This may have been the case with Darger, at least as far as his assumptions about the anatomy of little girls was concerned.

THE SURVIVAL into adulthood of a delusional belief in the existence of female children with male genitals would seem, almost invariably, to involve a curious and ambivalent mental state of knowing and not knowing.

*Under neurotic conditions denial frequently outlives the latency period and adolescence and continues into adult life ... The common escape into fantasy, which is of the greatest help to every child, is used excessively under the pressure of neurotic conflicts, and can then become the basis for a complete withdrawal and estrangement from the real world and its demands.*³⁶

Such a situation would seem to require reinforcement by trauma far in excess of that caused by the simple discovery of the crucial difference which distinguishes the sexes from one another.³⁷ That trauma, in Darger's case, could have been supplied by the sudden death of his mother just prior to his fourth birthday. Whatever point he had attained in his psychosexual development, there is sufficient evidence to support a prolonged regression to, and fixation at, the anal-sadistic phase. This shock seems to have contributed to, and maintained, an unconscious awareness of an all powerful and threatening phallic mother, now numinous because she was dead.

It was also at this point in his life that the concept of the female with male genitals became intimately linked with his sister. While all memory of his mother was repressed in later life, the obsessional involvement with this sister who he had never seen was established at this point in his childhood and persisted until his death. Inevitably, his conception of the missing little girl assumed many characteristics derived from his early experience of his mother, including the presence of a penis. A pathological identification with this essentially imaginary sister, and the resultant confusion of gender, is evident throughout *The Realms*, in relation to all the girl heroines in the work.³⁸ Since all little girls possess the male organ it allows for the possibility of Darger's becoming his sister, merging with her, or bringing her magically back to life, a process we have actually observed in the case of his identification with the murdered child, Annie Aronburg. In a very real sense all of the little girls in *The Realms* are embodiments of one little girl.

Darger's belief in, and doubt about, the existence of the female phallus he had never seen, and was never to see, is revealed through one mode of unnatural exaggeration. This is most readily glimpsed in his portrayal of the Blengiglomenean serpent, the perfect embodiment of the detached genitals of the phallic mother. In its purely animal form the enormously long and powerful body of the Blengin is little more than a gigantic phallus projected into the sky.³⁹ That these lovable animals concern themselves almost exclusively with children, looking down on them from above, protecting them from harm, and in particular from dangerous male adults who they attack with ferocious violence, convincingly demonstrates a link

with Henry's dead mother, now possessed of truly numinous and magical powers and dwelling in the sky. It was to this phallic personification of his mother that he turned in adolescence when his father had demonstrated his inability to care for and protect his son. With the invention of Blengins Darger truly moved into the Realms of the Unreal.

Much later, when the bodies of the Blengins tended increasingly, and finally completely, to merge with those of little girls (a tremendously interesting psychological shift), a link with Henry's sister becomes evident. The emergence of human-bodied Blengins involved a development away from pure violence and magical protection, and from the mother. Nevertheless, the child-bodied Blengin with its wings, ram's horns, and smaller tail, still represents in exaggerated form the illusory belief in the female with a penis. Needless to say, the majority of Blengins, while they possess the bodies of female children, also have fully formed male genitals.

THE URGENCY of Darger's need to believe in the existence of the little girl's penis is understandable, less in the context of anxiety connected with castration, than in relation to the very real fear of incest. Paradoxically, as we have seen in examining Penrod's relations with his newly acquired sisters, Darger seems to have felt that sexual intimacy was only really permissible with young female members of one's own family. On a conscious level he does not seem to have had any conception of incest. Yet, if one has a lost but living sister, sexual involvement with any female presents a real danger of unknowing incest. This is particularly so when one's sexual object is modeled precisely on that sister. The existence of a female penis

offers protection against such a possibility. The little girl with a penis, in the absence of homosexual feelings, can appear to be a curiously asexual object, attractive and yet repellent, a uniquely innocent vision of childhood. Darger's active addition of male genitals to each of the little girls he drew can in some sense be seen as a defensive maneuver, but one which barely conceals the intensity of his desire. The tendency of this imaginary penis to disappear between the children's legs suggests the instability of this defense, the dangers of knowing and not knowing.

Trauma and Sexual Identity

Although belief in the existence of the female phallus is a transitional phenomenon characteristic of normal development, the persistence of this belief into adolescence and beyond inevitably exerts a powerful influence on the psychosexual unfolding of an individual possessed of such unusual, not to say delusional, convictions. The expected result of this not unfamiliar situation would typically be homosexuality (it is this implication which tends to make Darger's anatomically unique little girls somewhat threatening to the perceptive viewer).⁴⁰ That this outcome did not come about in Darger's case requires explanation.

Speaking of various interruptions in the typical pattern of psychosexual maturation, Freud points to the narcissistic phase of normal development as a stage during which "the self" is taken as sexual object.

*What is of chief importance in the subject's self thus chosen as a love-object may already be the genitals. The line of development then leads on to the choice of an external object with similar genitals — that is, to homosexual object-choice — and thence to heterosexuality. People who are manifest homosexuals in later life have, it may be presumed, never emancipated themselves from the binding condition that the object of their choice must possess genitals like their own; and in this connection the infantile sexual theories which attribute the same kind of genitals to both sexes exert much influence.*⁴¹

Darger's personal variation on this not uncommon pattern seems to have involved a curiously uneven sequence of developmental events, in which the heterosexual choice of love-object was arrived at — in his case little girls — without the need for male genitals to have been abandoned. This rare outcome carries all sorts of complex and less well-understood psychological implications, chief among them the fact that the idealized object of one's desire can obviously exist only in fantasy. This was the impasse in which Darger found himself: compulsively attracted to little girls, but needing the presence of the imaginary phallus as an essential component of their anatomy.

The expected response to such an impasse would normally be one of compromise: a regressive move back to the homosexual phase of development, and the abandonment of fantasy in favor of actual experience in the real world. Darger pursued a more unusual course of development, remaining firmly heterosexual, but only in fantasy, and only with little girls. The inevitable result was a life confined to imagination in *The Realms of the Unreal*. That these fantasies frequently involved explosions of sexualized violence, sadism, and

murder, further qualifies the character of the heterosexuality he attained, while suggesting the extreme ambivalence of the attraction he felt for little girls, the chosen objects of his "love."

DARGER'S OBSESSION with a sexual object possessing male genitals, and the periodic eruption in him of violent fantasies in which children become the slave victims of sadistic and murderous adult males, have led individuals with training in psychology or psychiatry and familiar with his life and work to consider the possibility that Darger had himself been the victim of violent sexual exploitation and sadistic assault in childhood.⁴² Certainly, the strange character of his fantasies and the infantile nature of his sexual drives might seem to invite such an explanation, with massive trauma a possible factor accounting for his permanent retreat into a life of fantasy. The recent discovery of documents testifying to extreme neglect and cruelty at the Lincoln Asylum, precisely in the years of his residence there (1904-9), may provide what are mere clinical speculations with a demonstrable basis in historical fact. While nothing specific can be proven concerning Darger's personal experience of abuse, the chaotic environment in which he found himself offered limitless possibilities both of sexual assault and of physical violence.⁴³

One of the principal concerns at the Lincoln Asylum, as at other institutions for the feeble-minded, was preventing female inmates' becoming pregnant. Female patients were strictly separated from males, and cared for exclusively by women members of staff. As a result, the only possibility of sexual expression open to male inmates was masturbation or homosexual activity. So commonplace is open masturbation among the severely retarded that

efforts to put a stop to it would have been little more than perfunctory. That Darger was aware of this method of obtaining gratification is certain, but such activity may have carried uniquely negative implications for him, since he may have associated it with intellectual impairment and loss of control. In the context of institutional life no form of sexual expression is acceptable.

Although Darger never mentions homosexual activities or friendships in the asylum, the absence of such material from his autobiographical writings is not surprising, and does not imply that such incidents or relationships were unknown. Indeed, changes in the character of the inmate population at the time ensured that erotic activities of this kind would be far more likely to occur. In the years when Darger was living in the asylum large numbers of delinquent boys were being sent to the institution by the courts. These more functional and older inmates did much of the work on the farm, as well as assisting male attendants on the wards. By no means retarded, these wards of the state were allowed to roam freely through the buildings and grounds, with the exception of buildings reserved for female patients.

*They have a very bad influence on the children that are not as bad as they are, and have a tendency to ruin discipline, to break all the orders and rules that are made for them. They are bright enough to slip away and get things that are not good for them.*⁴⁴

Equipped with the normal desires of teenage boys, and the impulsiveness of delinquents, these high-functioning inmates would have preyed upon the younger and less capable boys, initiating them to the homosexual activities typical of all such institutions for boys.⁴⁵ This may also have been the occasional practice of the less inhibited, and often

less intelligent, attendants. It is possible that the young victims of these assaults were known by the term Henry used, "sissy boys."⁴⁶ There is no mention of homosexual activity in the newly discovered documents, but it is clear that nothing stood in the way of such occurrences.⁴⁷

*The Illinois Asylum ... had two attendant shifts. The night, or second, shift worked from 7:30 in the evening until 6:00 the next morning. It was a reduced shift with usually only one attendant on duty in each unit. A night supervisor made rounds from building to building to assist the attendants and to make certain they refrained from sleeping on the job. Although most inmates slept during the night, the night attendants were still usually kept busy ... Most cottages had at least one inmate who would "come alive at night." Some inmates were known for biting other inmates and had to be watched and sometimes restrained. Second shift workers were expected to watch for and stop sexual indiscretions.*⁴⁸

Although no possibility exists of proving that Darger was exposed to homosexual assault in his adolescent or teenage years, the omnipresence of the penis in his depiction of little girls suggests that, to whatever extent he was aware of the possibility of sexual activity, that activity would have centered on the imagined penis. That his only conception of overt sexual activity involved attacks by male adults on passive and helpless child slaves provides additional evidence of the traumatic nature of his early experience. Life in the Glandelinian slave camps and factories involves organized sexual assaults, with children systematically stripped and sadistically abused by the male overseers. Fantasies of knives and red-hot implements forced down the throats of child victims may refer symbolically to passive experi-

ences of fellatio (see p. 593). Other, still more bizarre, practices of the Glandelinians can now be seen to reflect shocking events unique to the Lincoln institution. One wonders if Darger's inability to speak of overt sexual behavior in *The Realms* reflects the enforced silence imposed on victims of sexual assault.

Darger's obsessional preoccupation with sexualized violence and overt sadism would certainly seem to point to some exposure in childhood to physical brutality and cruelty. In his writings he refers to several instances in which he was beaten by male attendants. We now know that during the years when he was resident in the Lincoln Asylum corporal punishment was much in use, and spontaneous instances of physical violence were commonplace. In fact, the situation in those years can now be seen to have deteriorated to an extent almost impossible to imagine.

When Hardt arrived at the Illinois Asylum from Chicago in 1907, he found what he believed to be a too informal, lax, and undisciplined attendant force. Often supervised by kinfolk who, Hardt believed, tolerated immoral behavior among staff members, cruelty to inmates, and disrespect for professionals (especially physicians) at the institution, attendants had become unruly ... Visits from town folk and parties among on-duty staff members were allowed, and attendants were permitted to spank, box the ears of, and paddle inmates who were disobedient.⁴⁹

The Lincoln Asylum Scandal

Darger's ambivalent response to violence against children provides one of the major themes in *The Realms*. As we will see in the chapter which follows, sexualized sadism projected onto the Glandelinians unmistakably formed a major component of Darger's own sexuality and sexual fantasies. What is now evident is the extent to which the brutal and inexplicable cruelty of the Glandelinians reflects Darger's actual experience of adult aggression in childhood, with *In the Realms of the Unreal* only marginally an exaggeration of the reality of the Lincoln Asylum in the first decade of the twentieth century.

In December of 1907, a patient at the Lincoln Asylum, Frank Giroux, was seriously burned on the neck and face. His injuries went largely untreated. The discovery of his pitiful situation led to an investigation of conditions at the institution, and to the eruption of a scandal of epic proportions both in the Chicago newspapers and in the Illinois legislature.⁵⁰

[I]n January 1908 the Illinois House of Representatives authorized a special investigative committee ... The investigation lasted from January to May of that year, the newspapers made much of it ... While investigations of abuse and neglect had occurred in facilities for feeble minds, most had resulted in dropped charges. None had rivaled the attention shown the Illinois Asylum's scandal. The investigation provides the contemporary researcher an unusual glimpse at the underside of institutional life. During several sessions at Lincoln, Springfield, and Chicago ... the six member investigating committee questioned a wide variety of people associated with the asylum ... witnesses painted the picture of a disjointed and disrupted facility ...

John Wagner, a former trustee of the asylum ... testified that [the asylum director Harry G.] Hardt had tolerated physical violence by staff members appointed by him and reduced the quantity and quality of the food served at the institution. He criticized Hardt also for his cold and distant manner with inmates and reported hearing that Hardt had also stolen money from them.

What began as the typical kind of scandal associated with institutions for the retarded soon took on truly bizarre aspects as events of unimaginable horror were revealed one after another.

During the hearings, newspapers reported that committee members had claimed that some of the physicians at the asylum were "dope fiends." Others testified on the case of John Morthland. Convinced that his recurring epileptic attacks were the result of sexual indiscretion, Morthland attempted almost successfully to castrate himself. When he died four days after his self-mutilation, few in the press or public were inclined to believe the attending physician's insistence that death was the result of his epilepsy.⁵¹

Another inmate, eight year old Virgene Jessop, received bites and scratches on her arms, face, and abdomen on the night of March 21, 1907. Several employees testified that the wounds were made by rats. The most damaging claim given by many of the same witnesses was that Superintendent Hardt had tried to cover up the incident ...

The case of Minnie Steritz was especially damaging. In May 1907, Steritz was severely burned while left unattended in a bathtub and died a week later. One attendant was fired as a result of the incident ... [Asylum director Harry G.] Hardt claimed under questioning:

"The child was of such a kind, that the pain, I don't believe would affect her very much; I know I have seen her dressed part of the time, and she showed no indication of pain, and I know it would have been painful to myself or any other normal being. She did not have the sense of pain developed to the extent of a normal individual."⁵²

Of particular importance in terms of a group of particularly terrifying anatomical illustrations of Glandelinian massacres, which we will examine in detail in chapter 11, is this report of pseudo-scientific activities at the Illinois Asylum.

Added to all this, reports surfaced that Harriet Hook, an assistant physician at the institution, had been keeping body parts of autopsied inmates. Most of these autopsies had been done without the permission of relatives. When more than one attendant testified that Dr. Hook in anatomy lectures, newly instituted for the attendants by Hardt, had casually referred to specific body parts as being those of deceased inmates well known to the attendants, the committee and newspapers throughout the state suggested ghoulish activities at Lincoln."⁵³

THE EXTRAORDINARY nature of the bizarre events revealed in the investigation report all but surpass our ability to believe or to comprehend. Darger's account of children starved and beaten, burned, scalded, or dismembered by evil Glandelinians takes on an unexpectedly realistic meaning in the context of his early experience of institutionalized violence. While he may not have witnessed the incidents described in the investigation report, he was resident in the asylum when they occurred, and would undoubtedly have heard of them through the grapevine which allows rumors in all such institutions to spread like wildfire. Sixteen years old when the scandal exploded, he was obviously

able to comprehend something of the horror of the situation in which he had been living for much of his boyhood. The traumatic implications of the unbelievable conditions of deprivation, neglect, and brutality in which he had lived for six years would already have had their effect.

Possibly the vast fantasy world which he began to elaborate in those years had a defensive function, enabling him to exercise some degree of control in a situation of otherwise overwhelming chaos. However traumatic the situation in which he found himself was, Henry seems somehow to have maintained his sense of self throughout his years in the asylum, with his rich imaginative life, and perhaps a determination to become a writer, reinforcing his belief in the intactness of his mind and intellect. Possibly the scandal of 1908, to the extent that he was aware of it, undermined whatever faith he had in the institution which he had come to call home, justifying his personal conviction that he did not belong there. However, that his first attempts to run away precede the outbreak of the scandal by at least a year, may suggest that he was capable of an objective appraisal of the life-threatening situation developing around him, with an ego sufficiently intact to respond to a dangerous environment in a realistic way.

At the same time, the nightmarish events occurring in those years, and the extraordinary callousness and irresponsibility of individuals charged with the care of helpless children, no doubt contributed to shaping his internal fantasy world, massively complicating his struggle to comprehend the nature of reality in an extremely crazy situation. Whether he ever saw Dr. Hook's notorious collection of body parts, or knew of her bizarrely personalized

lectures, he undoubtedly had heard of the dismemberment and disemboweling of deceased inmates of the asylum, and their preservation in a museum of the dead. The scene had been set. When, only a few years later, Darger began to write *In the Realms of the Unreal*, he was writing, in part, of an alternate world which he knew from experience, of an "unreal" which had been his day-to-day reality. We would do well to bear this in mind, retaining some vestige of understanding and compassion as, with Darger, we approach the abyss.

11



THE DESCENT INTO HELL

As uninvited voyeurs traveling *In the Realms of the Unreal*, it is now necessary that we trespass into forbidden territory. Approaching the demonic realm of the Glandelinians, we enter the dark side of the mind of the author. Unavoidably, we must make the descent, with Darger our twentieth-century Dante, into hell.³ We now come face to face with the fact that there are monstrous and terrible forces loose in the Realms over which neither God nor Darger have any control. Embodied in the Glandelinians, the "other," we must confront bestial aspects of our humanness, which it is all but impossible to acknowledge as human. Without this encounter with evil unrestrained, our exploration of the Realms of the Unreal would fail to acknowledge the emotional reality of Darger's fantasy, and his genius and humanity.

The path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell.

—Nietzsche¹

No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell.

—Artaud²

As a writer not of fiction but of history, Darger assumed no responsibility for the dark and frightening unreality he described on occasion. The Realms are activated by their own laws, their own internal forces, their own conflicts and destructiveness. To the extent to which the work can be viewed as an endlessly prolonged and elaborated daydream, it was motivated, to constantly varying degrees, by powerful drives. The mainspring spasmodically unwinding in *The Realms* is a tightly compressed coil of sexual and aggressive impulse.

On Darger as Daydream

I am the wound and the knife!

I am the blow and the cheek!

I am the limbs and the wheel! —

The victim and the executioner.

—Baudelaire⁴

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what extent Darger's secret and obsessive writings can be equated with purely internal fantasy: conscious daydreaming externalized on paper. At times, he was certainly inspired and influenced by more obviously external literary models. But, whatever his conscious intention, the irresistible flow of his free association betrays the superficial impact of these external sources, and exposes the strong and irrational prompting of subjective drives and images from within.

While the dreams of night, for most of us, are clearly dominated by visual sensation, daydreams make greater use of verbal constructs, with evocative words or brief phrases replacing, or at least accompanying, pictorial imagery. *The Realms* can legitimately be seen, on at least one level, as an elaborate daydream: a single, continuing narrative fantasy compiled without interruption over years. We experience our daydreams, as opposed to our nocturnal experience of dreams, as elaborated in the full light of consciousness and under the control of our will. This conviction, of the ego's conscious manipulation of fantasy, is far more illusory than we would readily admit. The brevity of most fantasy-constructs encourages the illusion of spontaneity and of control, obscuring the extent to which fantasy formation is a compulsive activity powerfully prompted from the

unconscious. Most daydreams, especially those of an overtly sexual nature, are short interludes of withdrawal from the world, occasionally ending in masturbation and orgasm. But careful investigation of a series of seemingly unconnected daydreams will invariably reveal hidden continuities, and the repetition of content and form.

For the most part, fantasy is elaborated only within the mind, remaining invisible to others. It takes shape in a private space, carefully hidden, a secret part of the self, more "truthful" because it is concealed. And because it is not intended to be shared it is seldom recorded in any concrete form, though it often influences the shaping of works of art.⁵ Fantasy formation is intimately linked to our experience of personal power or its absence. Feelings of helplessness, of passivity, or of lack of control over one's life, inspire the invention of daydreams in which it is possible to experience oneself as in control. Whatever aspect of life one feels oneself to be powerless in inspires fantasy. For this reason only part of fantasy is sexual. The more frustrating the external world, the more inclined we are to withdraw from it into a fantasy existence more responsive to our needs. In an external life drained of stimulation and meaning fantasy grows ever more luxuriant.

While for most of us, daydreaming only occupies a fragment of our day-to-day existence (though far more of it than we would care to admit), in occasional individuals the construction of a daydream can assume a more permanent and continuous character, with the long-term elaboration of a single fantasy occurring over years. The individual enters and re-enters a familiar and ongoing story. For such individuals the richness and complexity

of a single continuing fantasy provides compensation for the drabness and passivity of life. Such "continuing fantasies" become ever more inundated in detail as a small but encyclopedic private world is created, with its own rules, its own characters; its own detailed setting, architecture, and geography; its own routines and experiences. In such cases the mechanism of fantasy formation becomes increasingly compulsive, with endless, seemingly incidental, details of the daydream elaborated for their own sake. The "perceptual density" of the internal fantasy world may then surpass that provided by the external universe.

As a rich fantasy existence grows to fill the vacuum in life experience, occupying more and more of each day and slowly replacing reality, the individual can be seen to be living more in fantasy than in the real world.⁶ Time becomes irrelevant. It is only essential that the story not end, but go on and on so as to provide a space in which to live. The individual dwells for ever increasing periods, and with ever greater intensity, in a private and interior world. The single, elaborate, and ongoing daydream becomes an alternate world which all but replaces reality.⁷ Carried to an extreme the result is psychosis.⁸

In this sense, the whole of *The Realms*, battles, massacres, the adventures of the Vivian girls, natural catastrophes, floods, fires, explosions, belongs to the realm of intrapsychic fantasy. All of these narrative-constructs, however objective they may initially appear, are reflective of subjective psychological content, shifting moods and elemental drives.

IN VERY RARE cases, the nature of which we do not understand, a final step in the compulsive elaboration of fantasy occurs, when the need is felt to give the internally experienced world more concrete expression. Through the use of written words or graphic images subjective experience is allowed, to a limited extent, to occupy space in and to become part of the external world. In this way the reality of the "unreal" is increased, without running the risk of massively confusing internal and external events, or of slipping over the edge into psychosis.⁹

Darger's absolute insistence on the unreality of *The Realms* allowed him, most of the time, to maintain a clear distinction between his experience of his internal and external worlds. Only in certain limited areas did his careful testing of reality threaten to break down, leading to the danger of fantasy moving into action. This was especially the case when his continuing daydream was overwhelmed by sexual and aggressive drives; when sexual excitement or rage threatened to overwhelm his usually firm defenses, breaking down the barriers between reality and the dream.

AMONG THE MOST powerful forces prompting Darger's descent into the Unreal was his confused and troubling awareness of overwhelmingly strong sexual and aggressive fantasies and needs. Not able to acknowledge these erotic and destructive impulses and images as his own, he could neither give them expression in reality nor control them, except through primitive ego defense mechanisms, splitting, projection, and gross denial. As a result, the realm of the Glandelinians (the glands) is awash with horrendous violence and extremes of sexual sadism. Darger's daydreams were only

occasionally, if regularly, swamped by compulsive and perverse scenes of torture, mutilation, and murder, suggestive of overwhelming, indeed psychotic, intensities of suppressed rage and desire. It is to the examination of this sexual and aggressive material, as embodied in the writings and their illustrations, that we now turn.

Fantasy and Censorship

Given the fact that Darger's graphic descriptions and portrayals of sadistic assault, mutilation, dismemberment, and murder are almost invariably focused on the living or dead bodies of young children, chiefly little girls, this fantasy material inevitably provokes a strong response, ranging from shock, disapproval, or disgust, to active efforts in the direction of suppression or censorship.¹⁰ In the absence of any evidence, other than his recorded daydreams, Darger has been unjustly portrayed in some quarters as a child molester. This is to seriously confuse fantasy with reality, employing a form of critical evaluation which would necessitate the banning of writers from Shakespeare to Poe, along with a host of twentieth-century visionaries *damnés* such as Lautréamont, Artaud, Genet, or Burroughs. If we are all to be held responsible for actions carried out in fantasy, then a good half of the world will find itself condemned. It is, I believe, essential to differentiate between reality and the dream, particularly in the area of sexual fantasy. Certainly, in the context of a psycho-biographical study of Darger's life and work it is absolutely necessary to confront his imagination head on, to examine even the most controversial and disturbing fantasy content with objectivity and without moralistic judgements.

Accordingly, lengthy, violent passages from the text of *The Realms* will be presented here uncut so as to provide a clear understanding of and insight into Darger's vision of pure evil. Paintings that are terrifying in their graphic portrayal of monstrous cruelty and inhumanity will be illustrated and discussed in detail.

Nothing in Darger's psychic content is either unique or inhuman. Everything we encounter in *The Realms of the Unreal* is also encountered in human history and in the human mind in extremis. Darger's portrayal of evil, conceived and written down well before the Second World War, anticipates in elaborate and prescient detail both the reality of that war and the degenerate madness of the Holocaust. Part of Darger's unique value resides in the fact that in his secret art this usually invisible interior world is made visible. The pathological sadism and murderous rage directed at its own species by mankind in the twentieth century alone makes the examination of such material in the individual human psyche a matter of extreme urgency.¹¹

It is essential that we remember when viewing this fantasy material in its written or pictorial form that we are entering, uninvited, into a truly secret world, a world of images and ideas that were never intended to be seen by anyone. Darger is not imposing anything on us. We are invading his privacy. If, therefore, we do not wish to accompany him into the darkness we need only turn away. Certainly, for some people, and they will know who they are, the territory of the Glandelinians is best left unexplored.¹²

Defensive Maneuvers: Good and Evil in *The Realms*

Paradoxically, while we know almost nothing about Darger's sexual activities, we have all but limitless access to his erotic imagination through the rich fantasy productions in which it was embodied. The continuous record of his fantasy life, preserved over almost the entire course of his existence in his writings and pictures, provides us with an astonishing range of intimate material. Because it was never intended to be seen or read by anyone other than its author, and because he probably didn't understand the sexual implications of much of his fantasy, this material is open, naively honest, and uncensored.¹³

This was especially the case because he invariably believed he was writing about the behavior and feelings of others, the Glandelinians, and never about himself. There was not the slightest reason in his portrayal of pure evil to conceal or play down monstrous actions or intentions. He was protected from any awareness of responsibility or guilt by the consistent application of projection and denial. Beyond this, as we will see, there is evidence of a massive psychological split in his perception of self which radically separated him from his more perverse and violent impulses. We must always bear in mind as we examine this sometimes frightening fantasy material that Darger could never have recognized these thoughts and actions, this evil, as his own.

We are crossing a great divide at this point, which splits even Darger's "unreality" into two. In entering the realm of the Glandelinians we leave Henry Darger behind, to encounter the "other." While we must, ultimately, attribute these impulses and fantasy-constructs to Darger, he could never have done so, retaining his conviction of his own innocence to the end. Despite the extreme violence of the sexual and homicidal fantasies we are about to explore, there is a curious, but genuine, innocence inherent in the written descriptions, and particularly in the pictures. While Darger was clearly aware of right and wrong, it is doubtful that he had any understanding of the sexual nature of his sadistic fantasies.¹⁴ The more intense and disturbing the fantasies become, the more they appear to be those of a profoundly disturbed adolescent. It is as if we accompany a serial killer back into childhood, to an earlier phase when his bizarre sadistic and necrophilic impulses and assaults were directed against the bodies of small animals. In Darger's fantasies these small animals are children. To the extent that he remained a child, he was a seriously disturbed boy, frozen in time.

The split in Darger's psyche is reflected quite precisely in the political divisions in *The Realms*. His conscious identification was with the Christian nations. Meanwhile, most of what would have been his adult personality, including the pathological sexual and aggressive feelings and needs that rightfully belonged to that adult self, was split off and displaced onto the Glandelinians. Whatever he felt to be morally wrong, or bad, was almost invariably projected onto these imaginary adult

embodiments of evil. This defensive maneuver could succeed only as long as he was able to encounter this split-off self on a nightly basis when he entered *The Realms*. While these defensive maneuvers were largely successful they involved a high price: the sacrifice of his manhood and of all possibility of normal maturation. He made such a sacrifice, unconsciously withdrawing into a life of fantasy, in order to confine the monstrous desires stirring within him safely in another, and unreal world. That this was necessary will become more than apparent as we proceed.

The Child as Victim

The central problem in *The Realms* and the issue over which the great war is fought is the fact of child slavery. But this is something of a red herring, in that what is referred to as "child slavery" is really only an excuse for presenting the systematic deprivation, torture, and murder of children, largely little girls. The little girls are simply victims of sadistic, sexually motivated attacks by adult males, with Darger making very little effort to connect the institution of slavery in *The Realms* with real economic exploitation of children's labor. No paintings exist in which slave children are seen at work, and the child-slave uprising to which he refers occurs before *The Realms* begins. All that remains of the slave revolt is the vague efforts of the Vivian girls and their friends to rescue the child slaves.

The slaves themselves invariably appear in the story as helpless and passive child victims who suffer and die at the hands of their adult masters, unless rescued. They have obviously been called into existence by Darger so that he may contemplate their torments in endless detail. His documentation of their suffering continually slides into sexual fantasy. The great war that is *The Realms* is in reality an externalization of the war within himself, reflecting the terrible struggle to deny the destructive impulses he felt stirring within.

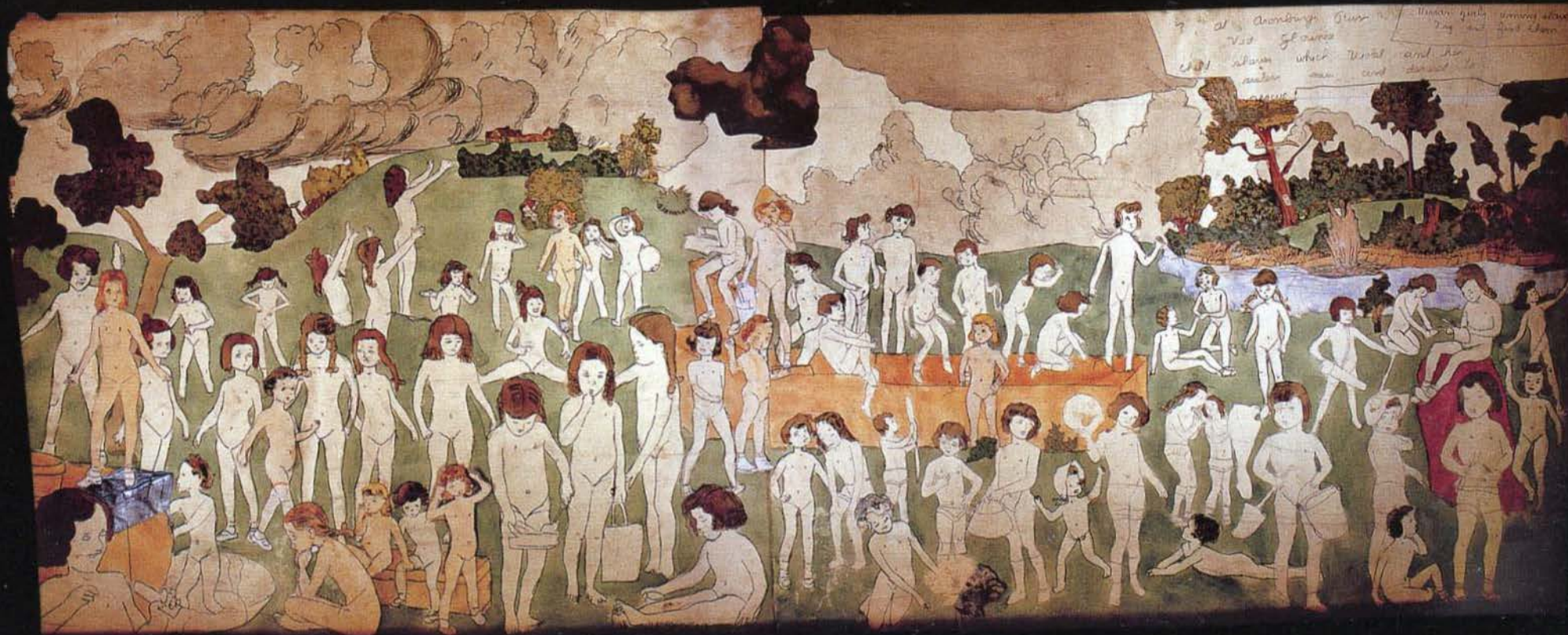
The response of Glandelinian adult males to physical beauty in little girls is intense and uninhibited. The child slaves are forced to discard most of their clothing, and are stripped at the slightest provocation. In making the children appear naked before them the Glandelinians need no excuse other than their lust. Darger appears to have understood that evil adults respond to such sights with excitement, though on occasion even he felt reluctant to represent total nudity in his depictions of child slaves. In the realm of the child slaves, and of Darger's more explicitly sadistic fantasies, all sense of individual identity is abandoned. The children, both boys and girls, are for the most part indistinguishable from one another, anonymous and passive victims. They are conceived of merely as the naked and helpless objects of unrestrained and meaningless violence. Their only function is to suffer and die at the hands of their Glandelinian masters.¹⁵ Our task is to enter the world of the child slaves and to gain some insight into their function in *The Realms* and in Darger's internal economy.

In a superb collage-drawing, Darger depicts the sad existence of young children in territory occupied by the enemy (11.1). The label reads, *At Aronburg Run, Via Glorinia. Child slaves which Violet and her sisters saw and desired to rescue*. Set in a gentle landscape of rolling hills, the scene is unusual in depicting no violence. The only adults are tiny collage cut-outs of horses and riders set amidst heavy foliage on the opposite bank of the Aronburg Run river. Arranged across the foreground are no less than sixty-six naked or semi-naked children, an elegant frieze of white bodies arranged with extraordinary subtlety against a background of soft green. Some lie or sit on the grass. A few carry buckets and play shovels, or parcels suggestive of work. Others just lie about, or even read. Quite a few wear little pants, some have bonnets or hats. All of these manifestations of the normal activities and situations of childhood are quite incongruous in the context of the slaves' new reality. Perhaps these children have been only recently kidnapped. Some of them have quite literally been cut out, lifted from their original graphic surroundings and glued into this new and alien environment as slaves. Through subtle variations in size (and age), vertical placement, and overlap, Darger effectively creates a sense of depth, avoiding any overcrowding of his figures. Each child seems surrounded by an envelope of silence, lost in his or her private thoughts. The banks of leaden clouds drifting across the sky imbue the picture with an air of melancholy that effectively conveys the tragic situation of these lost children. In the background at left a small group of girls raise their arms as if appealing to a black cloud that has been cut out of a newspaper and collaged into the sky. It is probable that they are seeking to attract God's attention to their plight, inevitably without result.

Their only hope of salvation, though they do not know it yet, resides in their being rescued by the Vivian girls. In an additional note Darger informs us that the Vivian girls are present, hidden among the slaves. We are urged to "try and find them." Disguised as slaves, they too are naked, but can be recognized by the slight tan which distinguishes their bodies from those of slave children who ordinarily never see the sun.

Given the fact that Darger has gone to great lengths in the process of tracing to remove the children's clothes, later providing a few with underclothing of his own invention, it comes as a surprise to discover that he has not drawn the genitals which are so regular a feature of his drawings of naked children. Perhaps a certain level of erotic excitement had to be attained so that his moral inhibitions could be overcome, and this final astonishing detail be added.

THE PHYSICAL BEAUTY of naked children inspires destructive rage in their Glandelinian masters; the more beautiful the child the greater their fury. The only sexual response they are capable of is unrestrained sadism, often culminating in murder. The only form of sexual penetration available to them is opening and disemboweling their victims. Thus, the alternate side of the split in Darger's psyche is characterized by unadorned perversion and bloodlust. When Darger moves, usually with extreme suddenness, into elaborate accounts of the torture, murder, and dismemberment of children, there is an unmistakable alteration in his state of consciousness, a shift into the minor key. It is as if we are suddenly at the heart of the matter, the heart of darkness. He writes as one possessed, as though for a moment he has truly joined the



11.1

Henry Darger

*3 At Aronburg Run,
Via Glorinia. Child
slaves which Violet
and her sisters saw
and desired to rescue.
Vivian girls among
slaves, try and find
them. Collage-
drawing. 19 x 48 in.
Collection de l'Art
Brut, Lausanne.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.*

Glandelinians, participating in their excitement, their perverse and deadly passion. And, of course, he has. Concealed behind the innocent facade of the boy-man are the murderous impulses of a psychopath.

At such moments we are observing something not usually seen, because such a shift in most personalities would lead to rape and murder, not to writing. The sublimation of such extraordinary violence must be a very rare accomplishment, allowing Darger, unwillingly perhaps, to make visible the darkest recesses of the human soul.¹⁶ However horrific the vision he presents, it remains within the range of what is human, a terrible force loose within his mind, and in mankind. We ignore it at our peril. Accordingly, we now begin the descent, with Darger, into hell.

Child Slavery and the Slave Camps

With a certain degree of regularity, in volume after volume of *The Realms*, the scene shifts to the child-slave camps, and to description of the lives of these helpless children. One wonders if Darger knew what this move inevitably entailed, the loss of control and the explosion of sexualized violence which he was about to experience. Probably not.

We learn something of the nature of slavery and of the camps from the Vivian girls who frequently describe what they have seen while in disguise and spying on the Glandelinians.

Now you may not know what one of the causes of the war is. We have also spied a whole lot and discovered the true facts about the horrors of child slavery and its sad and awful results. The children, the majority of them, have been stolen from foreign parents of foreign nations conquered in recent wars by wicked Glandelinians. All the child slaves do is work eat and sleep and very little of the latter too do they get and the food is very poor.

They are deprived of all pleasure, never allowed to play or enjoy anything and even such a sound as music is not allowed to reach their ears. If any of them become sick they die for it. It is hard for them to escape their masters because each child has a branded slave mark on him or her, showing the name of the owner, the address, the name and identification of the slave, and what work she is compelled to do. If one is sold to a new owner the branding is done all over again. Some child slaves are fortunate enough to have only tatoo identification marks on them. Others are branded with red hot implements and that is torture indeed.

It would take years to explain all about the child slaves. Their lives are as miserable as the lost souls in a way of telling. Most of them such as those working in factories, and public houses and all other industrial mills and plantations have to rise at three thirty in the morning, work til six, and eat breakfast. Then at six thirty they resume labors sometimes work that is almost more than they can endure and many are overcome every day. The labors continue

without respite until past noon, then they have what may be called dinner and then repeat the work until supper time. Then after supper work continues until nine thirty at night, when they are sent back to their masters and owners under attendants and to bed, to repeat the same thing all over again the next day. They don't receive any recreation, no rewards, no holidays no christmas joys and the like only the lash and extreme hardships. The masters receive the money for the service of each child slave he submits to the mills and industrial plants and the more slaves he has the more money he makes ... Nothing is done by the Glandelinian authorities to see that means are taken to save the souls of the slaves, and mostly all the slaves do not know about God, and what those who do know about Him know about Him is that He is not able to set them free.¹⁷

While Darger's model for slavery is derived from his boyhood studies of slavery and the Civil War in America, it is clear that much is added from his experience of life in the Lincoln Asylum and its farm. While the fiction is maintained that the children work, the true nature of the situation is quickly revealed.

The Glandelinians also made children slaves for very immoral purposes, while in still other instances the reason seemed to be that the soldiers who enslave the little ones wanted a little helpless human being who could be tortured and abused.¹⁸

While this too may reflect actual life in the institution, elements of sexual fantasy quickly begin to enter the picture.

The slaves to prevent them running away either boys or girls, while in mills, or at their master's homes, are allowed hardly any clothing whatever, summer or winter, only enough as underwear. All the child slaves, so they are known easily by their masters and owners and agents operating for them, wear long bobbed hair, boys and girls exactly alike. And when wearing little clothing for outside occasions are dressed somewhat in the appearance of striped prison garb, wearing the same as boys but in their fashion. But even then the children are not allowed shoes and the boys and girls wear their pants loose without belts or suspenders and have to hold them up with their hands when they are marched through the streets in sad procession. None of the child slaves are ever seen to smile and usually from their hardships though forcibly submissive to the rules are sullen and morose and rebellious.¹⁹

While Darger often refers to possible immoral purposes for which the children are kept, he is pretty vague and probably confused about them. On one occasion he clearly attempts to distinguish romantic sexual feelings from sadistic impulses which he could not admit had any sexual component.

Pretty women and children received the worse treatment and were made to work the hardest. The Glandelinians who had been placed over them were worse than the vilest villains, excepting that none of the Glandelinians tried to force their love on the pretty women and girls as is written in other books and particularly in moving pictures stories. It is not that I wish to leave such things out but

that I say the Glandelinians could not do such thing on account of the dreadful hatred they had in their hearts. No one pretty or not were spared the miseries of the horrible slavery, and the pretty women, girls, and children received the harshest treatment, and even cruel fist blows from the Glandelinian masters.²⁰

Since there are no adult female slaves in *The Realms*, it would appear that Darger has introduced them here only in order to distance himself from the kind of adult sexual and romantic feelings he had seen in the movies. It is certainly true that the sexual activities of the evil Glandelinians are motivated by aggression with no admixture of love. In a curious way this seems to have made them more acceptable to Darger, who did not have to see what they did to children as sexual.

IN THE MUCH LATER collage-drawings where we would naturally expect to see depictions of life in the child-slave camps, Darger, now inspired by the realities of the Second World War, introduces the new concept of "concentration camps," filled not with slaves but with child prisoners.²¹ On occasion his image of such a camp is derived, not from the recent war, but from the wooden stockades used in the American West in war with the Indians. A marvelous example is the picture entitled *Part One. At Jennie Richee. Violet and her sisters are captured denuded, and placed in a long concentration camp with child prisoners*. The wooden palisades of this unusual concentration camp, looking oddly fragile, extend clear across the nine-foot drawing, and then continue across the reverse as well.²² The wall is interrupted by wooden watch towers, topped by small log cabins with narrow window apertures from which to shoot. Barely contained

within a pair of pale green garden gates, the children are guarded by soldiers dressed in elegant eighteenth-century uniforms — white wigs and tricorn hats! Still dressed in their Christian outfits of purple and yellow the little girls and boys are engaged in a variety of childish occupations in no way suggestive of slavery. Arrayed beneath a blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds, they look as if they are enrolled in an oddly historical summer camp. This delightful scene continues on the opposite side: *Part II. Next day Vivian girls captured and placed in concentration camp with a large number of naked child prisoners*. Here we encounter a small number of naked child prisoners, long-term inmates of this colonial institution. These are the "naked child prisoners" referred to on the label. Despite this bit of "reality," Darger seems to be avoiding the terrifying vision of child slavery about which he had written with such passion so long ago.

Only once was Darger's darker conception of child slavery embodied in a collage-drawing, the picture entitled *At Jennie Richee. They are placed in concentration camp with crowd of child prisoners*. This is a rare work which may well owe something to the brutal reality of the Nazi death camps, about which Henry would certainly have read in the newspapers. A vast expanse of flat gray wash is bounded by carefully delineated barbed wire fencing stretched between concrete posts. A heavy pair of gray steel gates are firmly closed, while beyond the wire fencing a guard in Glandelinian uniform patrols the perimeter, armed with rifle and bayonet. Inside the grim enclosure thirty naked children stand or sit on what we assume is bare concrete or asphalt. In the empty distance, a moist but leaden sky is rent by a powerful burst of forked lightning. It is this dazzling white light which

illuminates the children's bare bodies, revealing their forms and facial expressions frozen in time, as by the flash of a strobe light. The austere picture appears drained of color, a study in dull grays, blues, and the white of bodies. Only the children's hair ribbons, and an occasional bonnet, add touches of pale color to this scene of desolation.

Darger has used dramatic shifts in size to suggest depth, and to space the children widely apart, conveying the haunting impression of soundless isolation in a crowd. Particularly impressive are the monumental heads and shoulders of three children projecting above the picture's lower edge. Through radically different facial expressions he suggests their differing responses to the painful situation, such as the provocative little girl with her tongue sticking out defiantly.

The largest complete figures are those of the seven Vivian sisters, completely naked, but identifiable by their blond hair. Because of their boldly silhouetted and simple body forms, and the emphatic graphic treatment of their eyes, they appear more capable and determined, less childlike than the younger children who surround them. In this subordinate crowd of small girls, eight of whom have clearly defined male genitals, there is a single boy, identifiable by his hair if not by his penis. He is depicted wringing out a towel. Unlike Darger's other concentration camp pictures, this is no summer camp, but a degrading and dangerous situation, though in the picture itself nothing is actually happening.

AS LONG AS we view the child-slave camps through the eyes of the Vivian girls, or their family and friends, we are protected by a filter of moral

disapproval, with lust obscured by pity. The violent impulses of the Glandelinians conform briefly to what we expect of the relations between slaves and masters.

It was only a few days later when Governor Hanson going into a child slave place on inspection saw something that made his blood boil. Three little children, two girls and a boy, had run out of the child slave pen but was pursued by an overseer. The children had just received a scouraging and could hardly run at all, as the wounds made them suffer. As they came Hanson could see that they were weeping as if their little hearts would break, and he was still more astonished when one of the little girls half naked sank down to the ground with a petious moan while another with a scream threw her arms around his legs and cried sobbing at the same time.

"My back is sore from a cruel beating the overseer gave me and my sister and brother because we fell at our work. Oh please save us." Hanson was horrified when he discovered that their backs were covered with blood ... Hanson taking the suffering child gently by the arm which was bared to the shoulder, "Don't cry. Trust in God. What is it the overseer tried to do?"

"I reeled at the machine from overwork." sobbed the child. "And so did my sister and brother. He had whipped other children before us, but when he did it to us, he did it worse and with a cat-o-nine-tails, and almost tore our skin."²³

This scene, coming early in the story, is quickly replaced by one in which the rescued children are

put to bed and read to from the Bible. The passage chosen is one of Darger's favorites, a stern warning that he obviously took seriously:

He that shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believeth in me, it were better that a mill stone be tied around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.²⁴

Later, a similar event will take a very different turn, as control is lost and events spiral quickly into the monstrous.

Six days later after the battle Violet and her sisters were sent to general Whilliamsburger Zimmermann near Phelantonburg with a message ... The little girls of course went in disguise. Tward the afternoon ... they entered a child slave house in the disguise of boy scout inspectors, and here they saw the worse horrors of their lives. Violet and her sisters indeed witnessed a heartrending scene.

Just as they entered ten children had swooned under a terrible beating from iron piked lashes. It was worse than anything they had ever seen before. The little children stripped naked were literally mangled by the cat-o-nine-tails which tore their skin like knives. Violet and her sisters could see the horrible gashes on the bodies of the children who in truth had died under the scouraging. Then the Glandelinians before their very eyes had torn their bodies open and scattered the entrails all over the floor, it indeed being a horrible sight for the Vivian girls to witness, but they did not dare betray themselves and so they could do nothing.²⁵

It is not unusual for the Vivian girls to find themselves passively watching horrendous events while able to do nothing.

"To know about child slavery in all its sad incidents you must see it for yourself." "Have you or your dear sisters ever observed much of it?" "Yes" she answered, and then as graphically as possible told him of her's and her sisters experiences while spying about child slave places.²⁶

These graphic descriptions provided Darger with an opportunity of contemplating the torments of the child victims and the excitement of their executioners, participating vicariously in both. His own excitement is palpable, made evident by the prolonged and recurrent nature of such scenes in which no detail is omitted.

In some respects the nature of the events, and the tone in which they are described are reminiscent of the sadistic fantasies of childhood. Indeed, all of Henry's descriptions of torture and death have about them an element of childish enthusiasm and innocence, which disguises and conceals the horrifying nature of what is actually being done. It is precisely the same quality of innocence which pervades the collage-drawings no matter how violent their content may be. We must obtain a deeper insight into the nature of this dichotomy, this mechanism which seems always to have protected Darger from any conscious awareness of the serious implications of his fantasies and drives, the "reality" of his unreal.

One of the meanest things the masters and owners do is to take advantage of the childish fears of the little slaves. Such as the fears of dark places, fears of painful treatments and so on. If a child fears the

dark she or he is locked in a dark place for days. Little girls who fear mice and rats is securely locked in a room swarming with them.²⁷

Aware of the reality of situations of neglect and abuse in which children often live, he drew both on his own childhood experience and on accounts in newspapers.

Indeed everybody in the world who reads magazines and stories and newspapers, has often been shocked at the revelations by the police frequently who had rescued children who had been treated cruel by parents, relatives, institutions, and the like, but it is positive not even such cruelty could not surpass what Penrod and his two friends had seen within the Glandelinian encampments since they were there.

Penrod rescued one little girl from an unventilated closet or cellar under one of the fortified dugouts where she had been kept for six years and one half like a dog in a kennel. Penrod estimated the little girl might be ten or eleven years old but when he found how her legs were shrunk and her pipe stem arms and sadly emaciated little body, which weighed only half of what a normal child should weigh, he realized she had been half starved. He while pretending to be a boy scout looking at child slaves had found that in her dismal cellar in the dugout that she was without a toy or a mattress to sleep on ... When she was removed to the base hospital on the rear of the christian lines, the little girl did not know how to climb into bed. Some might say how could any civilized human being treat a helpless little one

as Penrod found this little girl had been treated, but then the enemy does not appear to be civilized.²⁸

Sadistic fantasy in childhood is often masked by daydreams of being a rescuer. Such idealized daydreams must have preoccupied Darger's boyhood and adolescence, continuing uninterrupted into *The Realms*. He is also influenced by adventure stories of horrible tortures, imprisonments, and rescues. Newspaper reporters, one of his self-images, are often capable of such heroic deeds.

War correspondents and newspaper reporters of all nationalities had come to Vivian Wickey before the siege began, and had taken pictures and photographs which probably were sent to the Angelinian National Geographic Society to be printed in that Society's admirable publication.²⁹ Many of the brave war correspondents and newspaper photographers and reporters and the like shuddered at the scene they had taken the risk to witness, and they shuddered still more as they saw a peculiar looking box, with padlocks fastened to the top, and within it a little girl condemned by the wicked Glandelinian tribunal to die of slow starvation, and indeed their imagination told them how horrible that slow death might be. Yet they dared not try to rescue or save her, and the box was too heavy for a hundred men to carry and was made of iron and staunch wood. Maybe the heads of the Glandelinians were made of the same material. However heavy as the box was it was too small for a big man to sit, stand, or lie down. There was on the side of it, or at the least on two sides of it,

if you please to look, a hole big enough for the unfortunate victim to put out her little head or arm. When the photographers took the chance of getting her picture, or the picture of the box and the child, the poor little girl was picking vainly at the locks with her feeble hand.

It was a great comfort however to know that she was soon beyond the reach of the injustice of the Glandelinians because during the night a number of these brave newspaper reporters and war correspondents taking any risk, and fearful chances, managed by files and chisels to break the locks, while others kept on the lookout for Glandelinians and finally managed to open the box and stole off with the child. Dear Readers, let your minds supply the details of such a death she would have met had it not been for these brave war correspondents, the long horrible minutes, hours, days, and nights with hunger, thirst, and bodily pain increasing.³⁰

IT IS ONLY when we leave literary sources and influences behind, and accompany Darger into the dark recesses of his own mind, that we begin to encounter irrational extremes. He sets the scene with care, describing life in a terrible factory where naked children labor in impossible conditions.

"What shall we do with these christian children? Put them to work?" asked the guard. "The hardest kind of work will be too good for them." said the supervisor. "Transport them to Bandon's Iron and Steel Mill. See to it that their very insides are worked out of them." ...

The entrance to Bandon's Iron and Steel Mills was soon reached, the little girls being rushed up the steps or fairly dragged and thrown before an awfully looking manager, who grunted as he heard why they had been brought to him. He and several others took them roughly by the hands and led them into a fearfully hot room where steel and iron were made. Hundreds of children were working hard, stark naked before that fierce heat, and the Vivian girls seeing this shuddered. Scores of overseers were around shoving them here, now there, anywhere, beating one or another. Many children were crying and others in great distress were praying, begging God to help them receive the courage to strike or rebel. Whenever one of the foremen saw a child praying, he struck him or her furiously, and flung that child about so that they hurt the poor child, and even threatened to throw them into the vats of molten steel if they were caught praying again. Many times it happened that these horrible threats had been carried out and the real revolting horrors witnessed by many in the factory is too shocking to reveal in any writings. Not far from their hiding place Violet and her sisters saw a little boy get slapped and punched unmercifully because he could not work fast enough. All the way to the machine room, they beat him roughly throwing him to the floor, and rudely pulling off his clothes.

Misery was everywhere in that building, and the noise of the machines was deafening. One child overcome by the heat

reeled and fell into a vat of molten steel his death screams being heart rending. Two little girls were strangled within sight of Violet and her sisters, and before they had barely recovered, they were made to work harder at the dangerous machines. The heat of the place was indeed terrific and Violet and her sisters could hardly stand it, and the smell of the place almost made them vomit, especially the sight of the scarred body of the child whom two Glandelinians fished out of the molten steel. "Oh Dear God," moaned Violet, "Have pity on these poor children. Aid them. End this terrible curse."³¹

Darger seems initially to be in control, and struggling to remain so. "The real revolting horrors witnessed by many in this factory is too shocking to reveal in any writings." This is a promise he is unable to keep. The factory is forgotten as he slides irresistibly into increasingly bizarre sadistic fantasy. The claustrophobic spaces of his imagination are filled with far more than frightening mice and rats. Suddenly he is revealing all that he sought to withhold. From childish fantasies of persecution and rescue, he slides, all unknowing, into the obsessions and collapse of control of the serial killer. The transition is not necessarily slow and gradual. At times it occurs with extreme urgency, as his mind is suddenly overwhelmed by unrestrained evil.

The children were trembling with terror for the room was like that of a slaughter house, and as the Glandelinians entered with other children, the terrified ones drew back in the greatest fear. But the wicked Glandelinians made the children follow them. Dead cut up bodies of little children lay in rows, or heaps, while rows

of them hung by chains their little bodies frightfully sliced. Blood covered the floor, while the walls at the lower parts were besmeared with gore. In the small straight rows, hung the hearts of the butchered innocents, the lungs and wind pipe attached to it, while the rest of the intestines lay all over the floor. Skeletons were also hanging in rows.

... the overseers now entered that room dragging the children in with them. The frightened children stood in one line, while four others stood in another line. "These new ones were brought or kidnapped four days ago," smiled the Glandelinians. "Those four are my sisters," cried one of the boys. "Please, please give them back to me." "Nothing doing," said one of the Glandelinians. Five minutes after the children were strangled to death before the very eyes of Violet and her sisters, who had followed secretly endangering themselves to exposure. The strangled children were then dragged to the slaughter room, to be stripped of their clothes and butchered or cut up.

... They carried the children into another room, where the stench of decaying bodies came from, and threw them in, after Violet and her sisters had slipped in unseen. The dead bodies that were lying in that room were full of magets and millions were swarming toward the children who were stark naked. They were indeed frightened, for to be eaten up alive by such horrible worms would make anyone tremble with fear. They screamed loudly and piteously, but the only answer from

outside was a laugh. The children did all their best to beat off those flesh eating worms, and though they smashed many of them with their hands and feet they were quickly surrounded. It was a horrible sight, the "magets" swarming over their bodies, and though they tried to beat them off, or stamp masses of them, it was useless to try and get rid of them.³²

This is not easy territory into which to follow Darger, and we must remind ourselves that he had absolutely no intention of enabling us to do so. He undoubtedly intended to shock, to arouse feelings of horror and disgust not for our sake but for his own. A few lines later and these children are being forced to swallow "magets" along with pieces of dead bodies. There is an attempt at self-control present in this celebration of the macabre. By pushing his imagination to such bizarre extremes, he can avoid arousal for a time. But, in the end, this is a defense which doesn't work. His fantasies grow more and more explicit and sexual, focused on individual children and their sufferings. He enters into the strange, intense relationship that comes to exist between the torturer and his victim, exploring the outer edges of eroticism, the sexuality of cruelty. As with de Sade, extremes lead only to greater extremes. What he ultimately seeks to explore is death itself.

Strangulation

In all of his writings, from the beginning to the end of his life, Darger was obsessed with strangulation as a means of inflicting suffering or death on children. Hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of children, mostly little girls, are put to death in this way by the Glandelinians. It is by far their chief method of killing children. The reason for their, and Henry's, overwhelmingly strong preoccupation with this extreme form of "contact" between adult males and female children remains unknown and unexplained. No experience that we know of in Darger's early or later life offers a means of understanding this obsession. If he himself had actual experience of some form of strangulation he never speaks of it.³³ Therefore, if we are to obtain any insight at all into this cruel action, which he describes again and again throughout *The Realms*, we must examine it with unusual care.

Darger's descriptions of strangulation are extremely graphic and often portray the death of specific individuals, for example the murder of Clara Hortense:

... feeling for her neck in the darkness, after tearing off her clothing, and having got hold of which he at once lifted her halfway, dragged her backwards toward a large sink, prostrated her body halfway over it, while she screamed piteously, "Help me, Help me, Oh God, help me." After which the fearful Glandelinian got a fresh hold of her neck and then all was still, except that her assailant saw was

her protruding tongue and bulging eyes, and he pressed and squeezed so hard that her tongue seemed to protrude farther. He heard the cracking of bones. The child died quickly, the blood streaming out of her eyes, nose, and mouth.³⁴

Other incidents involving large numbers of children are described in more general terms, though the result is the same:

The rest of the surviving children who were helpless with terror were seized and their necks fairly crushed in the iron grasp of the Glandelinians, who squeezed so hard that the bones themselves were broken and the tongues of the children continued to protrude long after they were dead. Their faces were ashen hued, and their eyes were starting from their sockets.³⁵

There is an element of stereotypy in these descriptions, though new refinements are often added: "Children had been strangled to death by many thousands, their necks had been fairly crushed, and their protruding tongues cut out."³⁶ Dead children are depicted both in the text and in the illustrations with the symptoms of strangulation emphasized: protruding tongue, bulging eyes, and a variety of unnatural skin tones. Occasionally, in the pictures a garrote has been used and is still in place around the throat.

Strangulation in *The Realms* doesn't always result in death. This is particularly true in the child-slave camps where it is used as a mode of punishment or control. The Vivian girls are frequently strangled, but invariably escape with their lives. Such a scene, involving Jennie Vivian, is described in volume seven.

"You fool," he hissed, "Will you do as I say or shall I force reason into you?" And so saying he grasped her by the throat and choked her cruelly. She struggled and tried to pull away that grip, but the rascal choked her with all his might. He saw how she suffered, but he kept the crushing grip on her neck, while the other children horrified screamed with the noise of a cyclone. Jennie's arms sank limp to her side but the rascal let up before she died. She recovered slowly, the Glandelinian cursing and swearing at her.³⁷

It is of considerable importance to realize that, once captured, Darger's heroines the Vivian girls are as vulnerable as any of the child slaves. They suffer terribly at the hands of the Glandelinians, but while their bodies are overwhelmed and defeated, their spirits are not. Their active intelligence and resourcefulness, and their unique military skills, distinguish them from the helpless slave children.

Jennie remembered when the Glandelinians had turned on her sisters and grasped their fair necks in a vise like grip. The Glandelinians had taken great delight in their suffering, and she had never seen her sisters choked so hard before, and as she had seen their fair golden heads thrown back and their protruding tongues, she had become heart broken. Their faces had been purple and ghastly in hue from the awful choking, and she had seen the streams of blood come from their nose, mouth, and ears. To torment her poor sisters all the more, the Glandelinians had put pepper in their opened mouths. Their hands or arms had

been free, but little good did it do for they had tried in vain to tear away that crushing grip, but the rascals had only increased the cruel choking. They had been helpless in the power of such cruel men. They did beat at the face of the rascals, but to no purpose, and at last their arms had hung down and though they had fainted the Glandelinians had thought that they were dead. What prevented the rascals from ripping them open to pieces she had forgotten, but the brutal finger marks had been on their throat for a long while even months, and they had suffered a sore throat from the effects of the awful choking. An indescribable look of sadness overspread her face as she thought of these things.³⁸

The regular use of the term "rascals" to refer to the murderous Glandelinians seems curiously inappropriate. It is accompanied by an odd reluctance on Darger's part to question their motives, or to explain their feelings while committing these atrocities. Only occasionally does he provide a glimpse of what drives them.

Governor Federal decided to have Gertrude and Mary choked. He liked to take pleasure in seeing children suffer from strangulation, and ordered a Glandelinian to do it right away ... She hung limp while her tongue stuck out as she gasped for air. The Glandelinian liked to look into her bulging eyes, and to make her suffer worse, he choked her with all his might.

Although the Glandelinians frequently react to the children's sufferings with laughter, Darger appears to have known that stronger forces were at work within them; that at the moment of strangling there was a loss of control and an overwhelming explosion of rage.

The full fury of the general's wicked anger was reserved for the girls. He and even his officers, appeared to be enraged to the very verge of insanity.

The Glandelinian fairly acted like a maniac so enraged he was and tearing more of her clothes off, despite her pleas, he struck her like a raving demon of hell torturing its victim and not satisfied he beat her with his fists.³⁹

That the Glandelinians enjoy strangling and killing children is made more than obvious. Taken for granted, it requires no explanation. The more beautiful the little girl the more intense their rage. For Darger to inquire too deeply into the nature of their pleasure in strangling was to risk encountering himself, seeing his own madness. One unique method of participating in the feelings of the torturer, without risk of encountering his own emotions directly, was to force the innocent child slaves to kill other children. This had the advantage, from a Glandelinian point of view, of forcing them to sin. This is also one of the few situations where, in fantasy, a degree of intimacy is achieved between little girls and little boys.

[T]he Glandelinians decided to have the little boy killed first, as he was the bravest. One of the Glandelinians dragged the little boy in front of Gertrude, and as the Glandelinians tied the boy's hands and feet so that he could not struggle in his agony, the chief one glared at Gertrude.

Then another rudely grabbed Gertrude's bare arms, and when the other brought the other near enough, the chief Glandelinian cruelly placed Gertrude's hands around his throat. "Oh, how could you be so rude," moaned Gertrude, with indescribable sorrow. "I don't want to choke the little boy." "You will have to do it anyway," gloated the Glandelinian, as he pressed with all his might on her hands, until he not only choked the boy, but nearly crushed her frail hands. "The more you resist, the more I'll make you suffer."

If Violet and her sisters could have done it successfully, they would have went to Gertrude's rescue at the risk of THEIR LIVES. The awful look in the boy's face filled Gertrude with awful fear. She had no dread of loosing heaven for she knew that she was helpless, and also that the Glandelinian was choking the child himself. But the sight of the boy's face was so horrible to her that she knew how he suffered. And yet he could not struggle as he was bound hand and foot. The Glandelinian choked him so hard that he died very quickly, with his eyes still bulging, and his tongue sticking out. The Glandelinian then let go, and tearing Gertrude's paining hands from his throat, he carried the dead body out of sight.⁴⁰

Darger's interest does not seem to be primarily in the internal experience of the torturer, but in the subjective response of the victims. What he wanted to feel was the inner experience of suffocation in a child. Again and again he struggles to find words or images describing what it feels like to be strangled.

"Yelling hoarsely in my ear he shook me as a terrier does a rat. The shock produced stupor similar to that which seems to be felt by a mouse after the first shake by a cat ... it caused a sort of dreaminess in which there was no sense of pain or feeling of terror though quite conscious of all that was happening and it was like to me what patients partially under the influence of chloroform describe, who sees all the operation but feels not the knife. This singular condition was not the result of any process. The shake annihilated fear, and allowed no sense of horror in looking at the horrified man. When he grabbed me by the neck and choked me I had the sense of pain in my throat, ringing of bells in my ears, the sensation of dizziness and a clogged up feeling in my throat, then before my senses left me, I saw a bright flash heard a deafening crash and then I knew no more."⁴¹

This overly intellectualized and clichéd description is soon replaced by reactions of overwhelming panic in the children, as Darger, in his desperate search to know what his victim feels, is driven to invent new tortures, variations on the theme of suffocation.

GIVEN THE INTENSITY of his preoccupation with the idea of strangling children, and the hold such internal images had on his imagination throughout his life, it was obvious that Darger would seek a way to depict such events in the illustrations to *The Realms*. That he did so, with a vengeance, is a tribute both to his creative powers and to his determination, unconsciously motivated, to give pictorial expression to the powerful forces stirring within him. Intense social and psychological inhibitions would normally have to be overcome before any artist could come to grips with such perverse subject matter. In that pictures representing male adults strangling little girls would seldom, if ever, have been encountered in contemporary newspapers and magazines, he had to invent such scenes for himself. To what extent was drawing scenes of strangulation experienced symbolically by Darger as the acting out of an actual impulse?

We are fortunate in having a simple graphic study for such a picture, a drawing which shows Darger struggling to overcome the disadvantages of his customary technique (11.2). So primitive is this drawing that it is difficult to determine the extent to which borrowed material may have been involved. The figure of the child has probably been adapted from another source, Darger having removed all traces of clothing and reoriented the body horizontally in the air.⁴² His decision to depict the Glandelinian only from the waist up, but naked, makes this an unusual drawing. He rarely depicted an adult torturer even partially without clothes. The drawing of the corpulent adult body betrays hesitancy and confusion, so much so that it seems unlikely that he used a traced model. The simple sausage-like arms, and the shapeless trunk and belly indicated by a single line, seem to have been

11.2

Henry Darger

Untitled drawing
[Child being strangled
by a Glandelinian].
19 x 24 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



his own invention. No murderous hands are visible, the wrists simply disappear behind the child's head. The omission of this exciting detail was obviously intolerable; later he would find adequate means for depicting the crucial encounter of hands and neck. He also struggled to draw the distinct facial expressions of both victim and torturer. While a borrowed face and head may have been used for the adult, the final result suggests an image extensively modified by the artist. The shaded black pointed beard, the simple oval eyes and hooked nose, and the marvelous frowning eyebrows, serve to a limited extent to convey the furious emotion of this murderer caught in the act. However, as in his writings, Darger's graphic involvement is less in drawing the terrifying adult, than in capturing the anguish and vulnerability of the suffering child.⁴³

Once he had arrived at his formula for depicting the face of a living or dead victim of strangulation he used it endlessly. He had to invent on his own the bulging eyes and the abnormally protruding tongue. In this drawing the little quotation marks that define the eyebrows are suggestive of overwhelming fear. To what extent did he grasp the fundamental link between suffocation and anxiety?⁴⁴ The compulsive caressing with a heavy black carpenter's pencil used to create the shiny black surface of the child's hair suggests both the intensity of his desire and unusual levels of anxiety. In this simple drawing, he has captured his own subjective excitement, as well as the experience of the child, with an image which is closely related to his written descriptions of torture.

The Glandelinian overseer came up to Joice. This rascal indeed had looks in his face that would do credit to the very Devil himself ... "Now," said the brutal Glandelinian to Joice, "Will you obey my orders or not?" Joice herself did not give any answer and received a severe flogging herself. This did no good. "I'll choke you to death then," he cried in a passion. He grabbed her by the neck and pressed so hard that her neck seemed to be crushed. The rascal choked her with all his might and again blood came from her nose and ears. This time she suffered untold agonies. He had his thumbs on the middle of her throat near the chest, the human demon squeezing more harder and harder until her face was fairly purple under the awful choking. She struggled vehemently to tear away that awful grip as her suffering was indescribable.⁴⁵

Having invented a number of simple methods of depicting strangulation, Darger was now free to create large collage-drawings depicting mass murder, images devoted to the fully elaborated theme and variations dedicated to death by strangulation. A superb example is provided by the collage-drawing *Calmanrinia. Strangling children by revenge of defeat in battle* (11. 3).⁴⁶ In portraying such chaotic scenes of massacre, Darger occasionally seems to lose control: in a state of high excitement his line grows less precise, his composition less ordered.⁴⁷ The change is, however, strikingly suitable to the subject. In a tightly compressed picture plane, crowded to bursting with struggling bodies, individual forms drift and sway as though in the grip of a tornado; everyone is in

violent motion. The bodies of naked children (exclusively little girls) in the iron grip of the Glandelinians actually sail through the air, oriented in every possible direction. Their white forms, and the vagueness of the contour lines defining them, cause the children to appear insubstantial, curiously weightless. Scarcely a single foot rests firmly on the ground. Even the adults in their pale blue uniforms are adrift. So great is the confusion that it is all but impossible in some cases to determine which adult is strangling which child. Darger plays with this situation of uncertainty, adding far more children to the composition than adults, so that some of the victims are strangled by hands and arms that appear from nowhere, while in other cases a single child is gripped by two adults. One child is attached by nails to a tree trunk, while another is neatly impaled on a bayonet.

Attention is focused on the anguished faces of the girls, their protruding tongues and their hair, providing the only strong note of color in an otherwise pallid composition. It is obvious that Darger has deliberately sought this bloodless, washed-out effect, with loss of color evocative of lack of oxygen. The adult torturer known to us from the simple line drawing (see illustration 11. 2) now appears in uniform, at bottom right, strangling a little blonde girl with braids. But now his hand is fully visible clutching this small victim tightly around the neck. In the sky above, a curiously insubstantial "cloud figure" hovers over the scene, watching the destruction of the children, unable to intervene. Is this Darger's vision of a powerless and ineffectual God?

Henry Darger

*Calmanniria. Strangling
children by revenge
of defeat in battle.*
Collage-drawing.
Watercolor, pencil,
carbon, on paper.
18 1/4 x 35 3/4 in.
Collection Robert M.
Greenberg, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



ONE SUBJECT to which Darger never refers is that of the enhanced sexual excitement associated with strangulation. Similarly, despite his serious interest in hanging, he never refers to the associated phenomenon of erection of the penis. In the picture we are examining many of the little girls possess penises, but no penis in a Darger drawing is ever shown erect.⁴⁸ However, in drawings in which strangulation is emphasized, and there are many, the casual presence of protruding tongues and male genitals on the same individuals inevitably raises the possibility that the tongue, swollen and unnaturally thrust out, functions on an unconscious level as symbolic of the erect penis. Perhaps the "female penis" is made magically visible through strangulation? The open mouth and the protruding tongue would then take on a host of possible sexual implications, some of which we have already explored (chapter 10).⁴⁹ It is essentially in the collage-drawings where the penis is depicted, and not in the text where it is never mentioned, that we are confronted with these possibilities.

Suffocation and Torture

When the Glandelinians, and Darger, finally attain a peak of violence and excitement, they indulge in wild scenes of massacre in which thousands of anonymous child victims die. In these random and disorganized scenes they employ a chaotic variety of methods of inflicting death reflective of a total breakdown of control. However, it is in the more densely written and intimate scenes of individual torture that Darger achieves a different kind of intensity and of release. These accounts are so violently sadistic as to be all but unreadable, and they seldom are reflected in pictorial form.

Through these more obsessive and repetitive sexual fantasies he was allowed to enter into the mind and sensory experience of individual victims. He displays considerable talent as a psychologist, exploring impossible extremes of human experience at the threshold of unbearable pain.

His chief interest centers on suffocation and its attendant emotions. To explore this he invents tortures involving drowning.

[T]heir sufferings were not half over, the cruel Glandelinian soldiers dragged them to the barrel, filled it up with water as cold as they could get by mixing it with strong ammonia, and while laughing heartily, placed the first child into it head first, after tying a rag around his mouth so that he could not swallow any water in his gasps for air. On account of his intolerable suffering, and desire for air, the little boy made a vehement effort to kick the barrel over, but was unsuccessful. The Glandelinians only laughed at his struggles for air, and now cruelly made it worse by holding his feet so that he could not struggle. But then they let him go again because they did not wish to drown him to death. His want of air and his suffering could not be only seen in moving pictures, if his tortures could be caught correctly.⁵⁰ The more he struggled the more they laughed. Slower and slower he ceased his struggles and finally ceased them altogether. Then the chief Glandelinian laughing heartily, took him out and untied the rag and taking it off threw him roughly on the floor.

Then taking a little girl they tied it around her mouth, and also threw her in head first. Oh how she did struggle. She could not hold her breath as long as the little boy did, and furiously tried to breathe in the water, but the water went up into her nostrils the ammonia torturing frightfully and yet she failed to get air. Her head seemed to swim like a top, while her lungs seemed as if they would burn up. Her heart beat fast and loud, and the longer she was kept this way, the more intolerable became her suffering, and the more indescribable became her desire for air. She soon ceased her struggles, and for good, and the Glandelinians lifted her out and set her roughly on the floor.⁵¹

In the more elaborate of these scenes in which individual child slaves are tortured a whole range of different tortures follow one another, with Darger careful to describe the sufferings of each child in response to a single form of torment before proceeding to the next. Although repetition is inevitable, he carefully reports the varied reactions of the different victims, while exploiting the terrible fear of the others waiting their turn. He is remarkably aware of the overwhelming impact of these experiences on the immature ego of a child, emphasizing the traumatic nature of the experience, though he does not use the word "trauma." His insight into the psychology of traumatic experience can only have been derived from his own early life, a factor which would account for the repetitive character of his writings about torture.

A rag was placed around the nose and mouth of one of the little girls, and tied into a knot in the back of her head. For a

while she stood it without air, but soon she began to suffer. She furiously tried to undo the rag, but the Glandelinians had fastened it so tight, that she could not remove it. She could not stand the suffering, and tried to breath through the rag, but found it also useless. "Oh she must have air" she thought to herself. "Oh I can't stand it any longer. I must have air or I will die." The Glandelinians only laughed at her suffering and also was quite interested. They like to see how the child suffered when she could not get any air and how one looked when it got a bad choking. The longer they left the rag on, the worsed the child suffered. She had never suffered such torture before, and her nostrils felt hot and also painful. Soon she became dizzy but before she fell to the floor, senseless, the Glandelinian quickly cut the knot which was also too tight for them to untie, and took off the smothering rag. It seemed as if she could not stop breathing so hard, for every moment she took in deep breaths, without ceasing, breathing like a dying child.

The Glandelinians laughed at their plight and turned their attention to another poor trembling child who also was a girl. She had seen with indescribable horror how the other little girl had suffered, and she dreaded to go through the tortures of suffocation, knowing how bad it was.

"Oh please, don't smother me," she moaned, "I can't stand it without breathing. Have mercy on me."

"I cannot give mercy," laughed the chief Glandelinian, "There is no mercy in my heart, unless you forsake God, which I know you will not do, so do the same to her men."

"Oh don't please," she screamed as the Glandelinian seized her. "I don't like to be smothered."

"I don't care if you don't," answered one of the Glandelinians as he helped to tie the rag around her nose and mouth. "You'll have to be smothered whether you like it or not."

As she suffered, and vehemently tried to untie or pull the rag off, the pleading look in her face could hardly be explained, not even by motion pictures. But it did not in the least touch the cruel hearts of the Glandelinians, and the more she tried to tear away that smothering rag from her nose and mouth the more the Glandelinians laughed. They even laughed until the tears ran down, though the poor child knelt down on her knees, before them, and raised her hands in token of prayers, making signs to them to take it off. It was horrible to see how she suffered, and Violet and her sisters would have rushed to her assistance, were they not in danger of utter failure, for what could six little girls like them, do against such powerful men. The poor child fairly danced around the room, frantically trying to unfasten the rag, and only when she sank to the floor gazing with a sad pleading look toward heaven, did the Glandelinians cut the rope and take it off.⁵²

IT IS A PUZZLING fact that in more elaborate or prolonged sexual fantasies (not only in Darger) considerable mental energy is devoted to the imaginative invention of detailed architectural settings, particularly interiors. In the process of fantasy formation there is a significant tendency to postpone or delay specifically stimulating events. For example, architectural constructions of a very concrete kind must be imagined, and fully conceived in images, before any explicitly sexual activity begins. In the case of sadistic fantasies, the setting is often a carefully designed torture chamber, or a suite of such rooms, each of which would be devoted to a specific activity.⁵³ Given the extraordinarily "concrete" character of Darger's mental imagery, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that the majority of his torture scenes are set outdoors, with the dark side of human beings contrasted with the smiling face of nature.

Given Darger's obsession with strangling and suffocation, hanging would possess particular interest for him, as a form of both torture and execution. It was also one of the tortures used on the Vivian girls which he felt able to depict pictorially as well as in words. They were frequently at risk of being executed by hanging, and a number of pictures depict all seven of them in this precarious situation. The collage-drawing entitled *The Glandelinians "were" about to hang the brave little girls* is unusual in presenting Henry's vision of a Glandelinian torture chamber designed according to the necessities of hanging (11.4).⁵⁴ To what extent do these pictorial settings conform to internal mental spaces pictured in fantasy?

11.4

Henry Darger

The Glandelinians

"were" about to hang the brave little girls.

See how they were "hanged" in next picture. Central panel of a three-panel collage-drawing.

19 x 70 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.



Using Glandelinian colors, he has created a gray windowless room as the setting for an enormous wooden structure, a gallows to be used in multiple hangings. Two heavy black posts, set in square stone blocks, support a wooden crossbar. This beam is further supported at the center by elaborate bracing. One senses an element of obsessionality here, with doubts arising about the stability of the gallows, followed by the elaboration of additional supports. Such obsessional doubts, followed by corrective additions, are typical of the delaying tactics inherent in the "architecture of fantasy." The overly elaborate scaffold design may serve to confirm the idea that this unusual room is indeed derived from an internal mental image.

The Vivian girls introduce color and emotion to this grim setting. Dressed in official uniforms of bright yellow trimmed with blue stripes and polka dots, they also sport red tights above their yellow shoes and socks. Most have ribbons in their hair. While not exactly dressed for a hanging, they are wearing expressions which betray the reality of their sad situation. Their faces have been carefully modified by Darger, to suggest both sadness and anxiety. Tears flow down the cheeks of each child, a rare betrayal of weakness by the Vivian sisters.

Darger's inventive fantasy, with its emphasis on the concrete, is reflected in the ingenious device used in hanging children. Because their bodies are so light they each have a large brick tied to their feet. These bricks are poised on larger stone blocks each of which has a handle. Once the children's hands are tied and a rope placed around their necks, the executioner needs only to remove these stones and the children will be left dangling in the air, pulled downward by the bricks. Because

nothing is yet happening in this picture it is pervaded by a mood of expectation relieved only by an additional note written by Darger. "See how they are 'hanged' in the next picture."⁵⁵

While most Glandelinians seem oddly innocuous even when engaged in murder, the executioner in this picture is a menacing figure. Dressed in black rather than military grays, he reveals his Glandelinian affiliation through his "mortarboard hat," a unique version edged with red balls, and with a high conical center. His epaulettes, decorated with skull and crossbones, as well as the cruel weapon he holds, suggest his role as executioner. His black beard and gloomy expression are sufficiently frightening to confirm the worst fears of the children who are about to die.

WHILE WE KNOW that the Vivian girls will escape this, and all other attempts to hang them, other children in *The Realms* are not so fortunate. Hanging is not used only as a mode of execution, but as an effective method of torture by strangulation.

"It feels nice to go without air don't it?" asked the chief Glandelinian. "Well the next performance and the last for a while will be hanging by your beautiful necks." ... The gallows was now ready so one of the little girls was dragged under the rope. She fairly hammered away at the floor with her heels, and tried to strike at the cruel Glandelinians with her fist, but could not. The noose was placed around her head and around her tender neck. Then two Glandelinians quickly pulled her up and struggling as she was the Glandelinians let her hang there. She felt she had never felt such an awful choking.

But it was too severe for her and she became unconscious, with her pure tongue still protruding. Seeing that she was senseless, the Glandelinians quickly let her down ... As the boy had not yet recovered, the Glandelinians set about to bring him to, which took them quite a long time. When they strung him up also he fainted right away, and so the Glandelinians let him down, not wishing to let them die before experiencing more suffering.⁵⁶

Execution by hanging seems, in general, to have been too tame for child slaves, whose final end was usually far more extreme. I know of no collage-drawings depicting mass executions of slave children using hanging as the means of imposing death; however, a particularly moving example of such an event does occur in the text.

Now they issued an order that ten children were to be hung. The children were a little scared, but a strange happiness seemed to tear at their hearts, as they were dragged to the trees where they were to be hung. The ropes were quickly brought, and while listening to the conflict which was still raging and coming nearer, threw the ropes over the highest branches, and at the lower ends made a noose. One by one the ten children who were looking with a happy face toward heaven, was placed under the trees, and the noose placed tightly around their tender necks. The sight of their faces in their unearthly happiness thrilled many of the other children and they would gladly submit, when their time came. They yearned piteously for eternal happiness, and the chance to see God.

At last the ten Glandelinians pulled down on their side of the ropes, and soon the choking children, with their little tongues sticking all the way out, and their eyes bulging, as if they would fall out, were drawn to the top of the branches, and the Glandelinians held on the ropes and watched the children, who were dangling in mid air. Their suffering was unbearable and they could not help from struggling as they were of too tender years. With one more struggle, a faint one, they laid their heads on their breasts, their beautiful hair fell forward and they died. Though blood flowed from their nose, mouth and throat, no ghastly color appeared on their faces, although their tongues still seemed about to fall out. They seemed more transfigured than the others slain, and a strange unearthly halo appeared on their heads.⁵⁷

The muted tone of this oddly restrained description, suggestive of considerable sublimation, is maintained almost to the end and then explodes into violence.

Four more children were also strung up, but not so high, and their tender bodies were slashed unmercifully, with ugly knives, their bodies cut open, their hearts cut out, and sliced to small bits like mince meat. They were also transfigured.⁵⁸

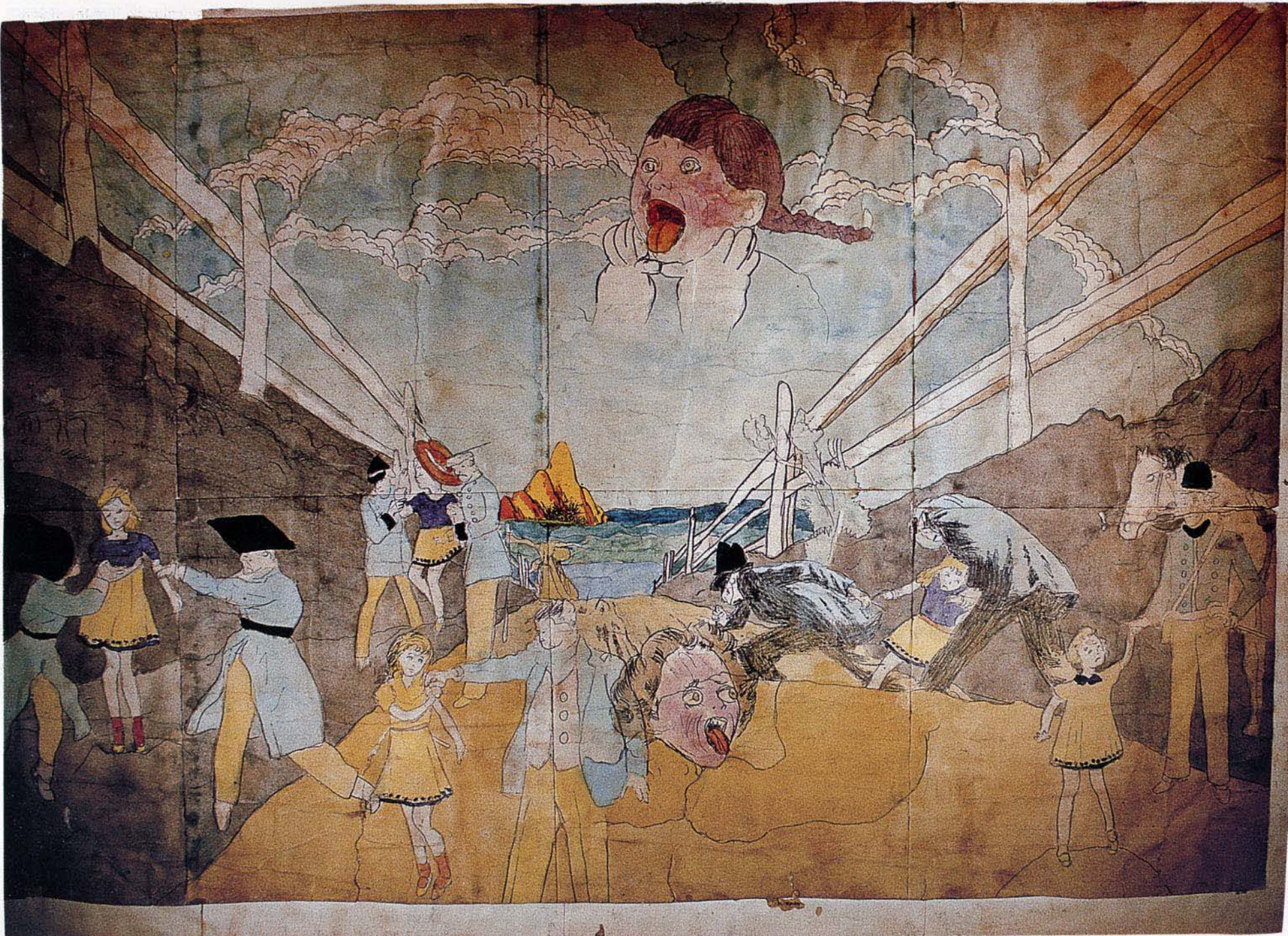
The Vision in the Sky Revisited

At the center of what we are trying to understand lies a fundamental human need, air and the ability to breath it in. Early in childhood death is understood as "not breathing," and small children experiment with holding their breath. But, for Darger, the stopping of breath was associated not with playful attempts at self-control, or brief simulations of dying, but with overwhelming anxiety and with experiences of panic or, more precisely, trauma. We don't know why. In our attempt to understand it would obviously be possible to indulge in speculation; for example to play with chance connections between breath, air, the atmosphere, and the weather, pointing to the fact that the majority of Darger's scenes of strangulation are set outdoors beneath the sky. Is there a significant connection between his obsessional preoccupation with extreme weather conditions, which he monitored throughout his life, and his intense interest in the traumatic experience of being deprived of air? Such speculative interpretations inevitably seem forced, and, in the absence of evidence, fail to convince.

However, as we have seen, Darger himself provides evidence to support this strange and unexpected association between seemingly remote concerns, in the extraordinary image of a child being strangled which he projects onto the sky. An enormous child's head, tongue out, eyes bulging, is often set among the clouds, or even constructed out of clouds.⁵⁹

One of the finest of these ghostly images appears in an untitled collage-drawing which depicts the capture of the Vivian girls by evil Glandelinians, a detail of which we have already examined (11.5). In our earlier discussions of the tornado "Sweetie Pie" we considered this image in the context of the terrifying storm which dominated Darger's autobiography at the end of his life. However the image actually appeared in a collage-drawing which was intended to illustrate *In the Realms of the Unreal*, and it is not therefore a depiction of the later "Sweetie Pie."

The picture can easily be dismissed as just one more depiction of the adventures of the Vivian girls, its portrayal of intimidation and aggression rendered innocuous by our awareness that the miraculous heroines always escape. It is certainly possible to take pleasure in the inventive and amusing ways in which the separate, and obviously unrelated borrowed figures have been brought together to suggest the difficulties experienced by awkward adults in trying to hold onto struggling little girls. Each child has finally been subdued in one way or another. Several are bound. The oddly ineffectual Glandelinians carrying rigid children in their arms seem at a loss as to what to do with them. None of the little girls is being strangled, and indeed the real subject of this extraordinary picture seems to lie elsewhere.



11.5
Henry Darger
Untitled [Image of
Strangled Child in the
Sky]. Collage-drawing.
24 x 23 1/2 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

Setting the scene outdoors, Darger has created a deeply plunging composition which forces our attention into the depths of the pictorial space. Steep and strangely menacing stone walls topped by a white fence force our eyes to follow a dull yellow road, a kind of jetty which leads out to sea, ending abruptly in distant waves. Far out across the blue-green water a small island (a collage cut-out) rises out of the sea. This powerful visual recession has seemingly been created, not so much as a means of trapping the children on a dead-end road, as to force us to attend to startling phenomena, strange visions of which neither the children nor the adults seem to be aware.

On the road, in the near foreground, a large child's head emerges from the earth, an impossible specter of a strangled little girl. Unlike the real children whose skin is white, this ghostly presence is rendered in intense color, a deep pink which along with the enormous bulging eyes and protruding tongue suggests suffocation. The disembodied head appears to be being strangled by huge arms and hands which rise right out of the road, partaking of its sandy surface. Inexplicably, this boulder-like apparition emerges amidst the struggling children and adults, as if to acknowledge and witness the suffering of the Vivian girls.

But then, still more unexpected, when we follow the main lines of the composition back into the distance, high above the flamelike island looms another unsettling vision. Set in the delicate washes of a limpid blue sky filled with summer clouds is the head of yet another child victim of strangulation. Still more massive, this giant face displaying evident signs of distress hangs in the sky like a pink moon. Not a true cloud-image because it is not white, this vision of a suffering child in the grip of cloud-hands is brilliantly colored and drawn in unusual detail, one of the most successful depictions of a strangled child in Darger's art (see illustration 9.4). The unnatural tone of the skin, a purplish pink, is further enhanced by the elaborately textured mauve hair and pigtail. The detailed rendering of the mouth, wide open with tongue sticking out, is carefully defined in variations of clear red. Unique among Darger's gaping mouths, this one suggests a soundless scream which reverberates out across the landscape. The bulging eyes, the arched eyebrows, the lines of tension around the mouth, effectively convey acute anxiety and pain. Two white clouds assume the ghostly form of strangling hands carefully arranged around the child's neck. Since they are true cloud-hands Darger has risked drawing them freehand. Roughly sketched, they contrast with the firm lines of the face which has been carefully traced and painted.

Because of their intense color both of the visionary images stand out strongly in what is otherwise a pale composition. Their unnatural tones imply a different and otherworldly reality. Who was this child whose image rises out of the earth and is projected onto the sky? What were these haunting visions of a strangled child intended to convey? It is striking that neither the children nor the adults in the picture notice these specters; they are simply there. They were obviously visible to Darger since he chose to depict them. Since at this stage Darger was not yet concerned with the storm Sweetie Pie, it seems probable that he is evoking the specter of the murdered Annie Aronburg, the first child to die as a result of strangulation in *The Realms*. The unsolved, and essentially unexplained, mystery which lies at the very heart of *The Realms* concerns the death of a little girl by strangulation, and this disturbing image materializes constantly in Darger's art, appearing again and again throughout his life. It was unmistakably an obsession which haunted his nights and days, troubling his existence. In *The Realms* he plays it over and over in endless variations. In reality he may well have seen it as an icon in the clouds, and like a threatening specter it may have seemed to rise out of the ground before him, dogging his footsteps. We do not know why. The mystery remains unsolved.

Fire

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

—Robert Frost⁶⁰

One of the early and more disturbing preoccupations which troubled Darger's childhood was his excessive interest in fire. We have seen how great fires flare up in *The Realms*, monstrous forest fires which rage like the fires of Hell, destroying everything in their paths and often threatening the lives of the children. Not surprisingly, fire is also used by the Glandelinians in their sadistic assaults on slave children. In choosing to explore this means of inflicting pain or death Darger was to some extent inspired by examples from the Bible, in particular, the account of Daniel's companions cast into the fiery furnace.⁶¹ Even more influential was his troubling awareness of fire as the chief torment of sinners confined in Hell. That the Glandelinians would torture innocent children with fire was therefore both monstrous and confusing. Darger's sadistic inclinations were to some extent inspired and supported by the graphic descriptions of the martyrdom of Christian saints, the most important among them the death of a heroine celebrated in his church, Joan of Arc. In that his fantasies centered primarily on little girls, he was also much stimulated by Bible stories describing the execution of pure and helpless children, in particular the massacre of the innocents.⁶²

It is his prolonged accounts of the torture of children in furnaces which owes most to biblical models. In these long descriptions of the agony of child slaves tormented by being burned or scalded, his prose reaches near frenzy, his excitement mounting with the flames. He makes use of a device commonly encountered in sadistic fantasy, where the goal is inflicting and prolonging pain rather than killing the victim. Thus, before being exposed to fire the naked bodies of the children are rubbed with a substance which protects them from being consumed by the flames, while allowing them to feel the full intensity of pain. Such naive inventions point to childhood as the point of origin of these fantasies.

"You know about the furnace don't you? We'll rub that powerful lotion on their bodies, and throw them in." Gertrude and Mary were quickly stripped of their clothes, and the powerful stuff rubbed on their tender bodies.

The furnace itself was in governor Federal's palace, and in the room next to his. It was larger than the one Daniel and his two companions were thrown in, and was of tons of white hot coals.⁶³ It was about two rods wide inside, and seven rods long, and eighteen feet deep, from the sill of the floor to the ceiling. So much coal had been thrown in that it reached even higher than the door sills, and was hot like a small hell. The Glandelinians who went near this furnace, had the same lotion on them that is used to save human beings from suffering from the intense heat. The lotion put on Gertrude and Mary only protects them from death but not from suffering.

Down on the hard floor Mary knelt, placing her frail little arms tightly about the Glandelinians knees, and cried bitterly.

"Let go of me, you little slave, let go of me," he cried.

"I can't, I can't," screamed the frightened child. "Oh sir, I don't want to be thrown into that awful fire, and if you do it will kill me, it surely will. I don't want to die and neither do you. Oh, you mustn't, you mustn't throw me into that awful fire. Please don't." And then unable for further utterance, the child broke into a pitiful fit of weeping.

The cruel Glandelinian had been looking down at her with a frown, and half comical look on his ugly countenance. But at the sight of her tears it was strange to see the effect wrought almost immediately on the Glandelinian's face. From the drawn and half comical look, a deadly scowl was in its place, and mercilessly lifting the child by the throat he carried her struggling toward that awful furnace choking her as hard as he could. Then despite her kicking and beating at him with her hands, he cruelly threw her in.

He then threw all of the children in except a little girl called Jennie Sanders, who was appalled beyond describing at this horrible sight and the deafening screams that the children made. They tried to get out for their suffering was unbearable, but the Glandelinians only laughed, and stirred up the fire to make it hotter. The sight of the suffering children was something appalling, and their screams and pleads piteous to behold. But what mercy

did the Glandelinians have? The more piteous the children screamed, the more did the Glandelinians laugh. The children tried desperately to climb the walls to get out of the reach of the cruel flames, but it was useless. The children with all their vehemence tried to get out, and beat at the Glandelinians, for they had left the door open to see the performance as they called it. But the Glandelinians only shoved them back in, laughing like fiends. At last when the lotion threatened to wear off from the heat, the Glandelinians pulled the children out with long hooks and flung them rudely on the floor, where they writhed in indescribable agony.⁶⁴

At moments such as these, and they occur with some regularity, one senses that Henry has truly "joined the Glandelinians." His disapproval merely a pose, he is interested mainly in describing the experience of the children as if from inside. Once again, the pleading of a single slave, Mary, is used to explore the nature of truly overwhelming emotion, with the inner experience of anticipating terror far more agonizing than the external sensation of fire. While his account of the sufferings of the children in the fire seems to be based less on actual experience than on imagination (as compared with his descriptions of suffocation), his understanding of the traumatic effect of unbearable intensities of sensation and feeling seems to derive from intuitive knowledge and lived experience.⁶⁵ At times he is aware that in describing such extreme events he is going beyond what his imaginary reader, or he himself perhaps, can withstand.

The pain of all this was so dreadful that they made deafening screams, and vehement struggles to force the door open. The suffering was so awful that it was like the agony of a damned soul. There was no friendly face anywhere to comfort them, or to rescue them, and the look in their faces told how they suffered ... It was indeed indescribable and too much for any person to witness.⁶⁶

Perhaps it was for this reason that he seems to have avoided depicting the furnace scene in any of the collage-drawings, though other varieties of extreme violence failed to awaken any such inhibitions in his creative process.⁶⁷ On occasion, Darger seems unable to accompany the Glandelinians in their endless quest for sadistic pleasure. By allowing children to die, he deprives the adult torturers of their victims.

Some of the children in a separate factory who were overcome from work and reeled were also undergoing torture, the Glandelinians decided to throw them into a tank of hot water. The same kind of medicine was rubbed on them, and they were all thrown in, all in a bunch. Screaming frantically, they furiously tried to get out of the tank of hot water, but the sides were so high that they could not. Their sufferings were horrible, and despite that the medicine to the intense disappointment of the Glandelinians the children died.⁶⁸

In other situations fire is used more directly as a means of execution, with disobedient or rebellious children simply burned at the stake.

Anybody can no doubt remember how a little innocent girl child bringing a piece of wood for a Glandelinian officer, was burned alive at the stake just because she brought the wrong piece for which she was going to get a thrashing with.⁶⁹

Finally, fire is used to eliminate children who the Glandelinians no longer have any use for, their lust having been extinguished. On these occasions, the victims fed to the fire, although incredibly numerous, are disposed of quickly.

One devilish Glandelinian gained a great name for himself by an act of peculiar atrocity. He forced seventeen hundred children, all little girls, to build a terribly hot coal fire and to fetch fire wood for heating it. As soon as they had concluded their labors they were bound hand and foot to trees, and there tortured for many hours, and finally after the Glandelinians had choked so many to unconsciousness within a few minutes, he threw cold water on them to make them come to, and then bound them tightly with chains and threw them into the fire their very own hands had prepared.⁷⁰

It is obviously difficult to follow seventeen hundred children into the fire and to share vicariously in their sensations and feelings. In chapters dealing with child slaves Darger tends to focus on the torment of small groups of children, or even on individuals who he could identify with, participating in their experience more as victim than as torturer. As with all sadists, what is really being

sought is a *participation mystique* with the victim, and with their internal experience of overwhelming sensation and emotion.⁷¹ For example, the decision to leave one child, Jennie Sanders, out of the fiery furnace, was carefully calculated. Her suffering is of particular interest to Darger in that it is mental rather than physical. She observes the sufferings of others and waits for her turn in the fire. It was usually with such silent and passive victims, separated somehow from the other children and uniquely vulnerable, that he identified. Unlike the other slaves, Jennie emerges as an individual, a character in *The Realms* who undergoes limited psychological development, and whose sad fate we are allowed to follow over many chapters as Darger attempts to understand the impact of trauma on the immature ego of one little girl. For Jennie, forced to endure torture in isolation, the result is madness.

The little girl Jennie nearly fainted at the sight of the suffering children, but to think that she also was to be thrown in also filled her with indescribable terror. Jennie was now too frightened to move a foot was now thrown. It was awful to see what happened to Jennie when she was thrown in. To see the others suffer was awful, but when she had to endure the awful awful pain it was too much for her.⁷²

Jennie is left in the furnace, forgotten while the Glandelinians get caught up in other atrocities. The result is sufficiently important to initiate a new chapter.

Jennie Becomes Insane.

The very room was filled with a piercing nearly unearthly scream, and like a catamount,⁷³ Jennie sprang out of the furnace, and landed on the floor twelve yards away. The suffering in that horrible furnace had driven her insane. The demented little Jennie, with red foam running from her mouth, glared at the Glandelinians with rolling eyes, and crouched for a spring at the wicked Glandelinian who was choking Mary yet. But he was on his guard and dropping Mary he sprang out of her way, while several Glandelinians rushed forward to overpower her. But she was too quick for them and got away.⁷⁴

At various unexpected moments in volume three, mad Jennie will suddenly appear to provide Darger with another opportunity for a short digression on madness. For an individual who spent much of his childhood in an asylum for children, his conception of mental illness is curiously stereotypical. Nevertheless, precisely because of her insanity, this child seems to have occupied his imagination. She became the "wild cat girl" of his boyhood; dangerous, powerful, and to be feared, even by the Vivian girls (see p. 51).

Making their way out into the hall Violet and her sisters felt cautiously along the dark hallway, and presently came to another door. It suddenly sprang open with a crash, and something in human shape landed with both feet on Joice's shoulders. "Ouch" A grunt of pain accompanied by a string of uncanny screams, that might have astonished an indian,

resounded through the hallway in deafening echoes, as both Joice and her assailant went to the floor rolling over and over, the maniac pummeling and mauling Joice unmercifully. By a sudden wrench Joice got away from her furious assailant, which proved to be Jennie.

With a snarl she made direct for Violet ... In an instant the insane child was scratching away with her hands, and biting and snarling like a tigress, tearing an ugly gash in her shoulder, while Violet screamed like a doomed soul ... The sight of Jennie almost chilled the blood in their veins, for now she was glaring at Violet alone, with bloodshot eyes. It was appalling. Violet had heard many stories of the ferocity and cruelty of insane people, and knew it was almost certain death to combat with the dangerous kind unarmed ... The poor children were clean stumped. They were indeed in a terrible predicament. Not one of them had any weapon, and in an instant the dangerous child would spring upon them and tear them to pieces one by one.⁷⁵

On the Reality of Fantasy

While this long introduction to the true nature of child slavery in *The Realms of the Unreal*, with its detailed accounts of sadistic attacks on individual children, must inevitably prove trying to even the most dedicated reader, it is necessary to remember that the few passages we have examined represent only the slightest indication of the real extent of this material. As well, our presentation of the scenes of torture occurring in the child-slave camps suffers from being overly organized. The various kinds of torment have been examined separately in order to give the reader a degree of insight into their content and function. In fact, Darger jumps randomly from torture to torture guided only by his mounting excitement. Throughout the fifteen volumes of *The Realms*, he returned again and again to such torture scenes, obviously needing to experience vicariously extremes of suffering and of emotional intensity in children. While the amount of such material in his history of another world should not be exaggerated, representing, at most, no more than 1 percent of the text and illustrations, the systematic torture scenes are so powerful in their effect as to suggest that they represent a principal impetus behind the writing of *The Realms*. The great war that is *The Realms* is, after all, fought over the issue of child slavery. Study of the horrific experiences of the girls, and more rarely boys, makes it apparent that far more is occurring in the territory of the Glandelinians, and in Darger's mind, than mere utilization of forced child labor. As we have seen, child slavery, as conceived by Darger, is really only a pretext for extravagant scenes of overt sadism directed at little girls.

That Darger's sexual life, confined it would seem largely to fantasy, was characterized by extraordinarily violent sadistic drives cannot be doubted, any more than we can doubt that his sexual drives had as their exclusive object little girls. To what extent he was successful in dissociating himself from these powerful needs, by a defensive splitting of the ego, attributing all such impulses to the Glandelinian enemy, remains unclear. Nor do we know whether, at some point in his life, "he joined the Glandelinians" (which he says he did), acting on these impulses in reality. What is clear is that in him sexual desire was intensified, to an all but unbearable level, by an admixture of aggression and rage. Throughout his life he was prone to sudden explosions of fury, which he referred to as tantrums. Is it possible that such explosive forces could have been confined throughout his development to *In the Realms of the Unreal*? As yet, we have not approached the full extent of that rage, or of the absolutely chaotic violence, which only becomes apparent in the accounts of the massacres of children to which we are about to turn.

Before setting out to examine what is a bloodbath of unrestrained aggression of epic proportions, I want to pause to consider some of the ways in which psychological truth is to be found in these fantasies of more systematic violence. Throughout *The Realms* one senses an almost complete inability to conceive of human relationship. A lack of genuine feeling for other human beings characterizes all of the characters in the story. This becomes especially apparent in the sadistic material we have been examining, where we sense the absence of any real appreciation of the reality of the children, as well as a lack of any genuine concern at what is happening to them. It is this

failure to perceive the children as real that permits the orgies of sadistic violence and murder to occur. A similar quality and level of schizoid perception is characteristic of human relations as depicted in the writings of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), with which much of the preceding material can objectively be compared.⁷⁶ The Glandelinians also resemble de Sade in their constant preoccupation with defying God, the sacraments, and the religious beliefs of their victims (see chapter 12). In their one-sidedness, the Glandelinians are utterly unreal: cardboard cut-outs, caricatures of violence, called into being only as the recipients of Darger's projections. To a far greater degree than is the case in more normal works of fiction, Darger's writings are pure and clearly structured expressions of the psyche externalized. Nevertheless, as embodiments of evil, of monstrous, but human, destructive drives, and of sexual perversion, the Glandelinians should be taken seriously, for the drives which find expression with their help are undeniably real.

At rare moments Darger verges on psychological insight as he explores impulses which are his own.⁷⁷ For example, in the midst of scenes of astonishing violence directed at Jennie Vivian, two Glandelinians suddenly manifest human feelings, with suspect tenderness stirring in their dark souls.

"Let's kill her to put her out of her misery."

"No," said another, "It would only be murder and probably she won't live long anyway now. But murder or not, I would like to kill him if I could for treating a poor little girl like her the way he has done."

"Let's do it, eh?" said another, slapping Jennie on the back to make her recover for she was still gasping ... Then we could save this poor darling." Jennie soon recovered under the urgent treatment of the two Glandelinian overseers, and they again laid her on the cotton pile which was more softer than a bed.

"How do you feel now, little girl?" asked one of the men whose name was Samuel Swearington ...

Jennie felt craving love for these two men who had saved her, and to Sam's surprise she threw her arms around his neck and wept bitterly. The two men themselves also wept but almost for joy for they intended that Jennie should not be under the power of that brute again. Sam rubbed her neck, but gently, trying to give her some relief ... The two men hugged Jennie gently, Sam pressing her against his bosom, and stroking her forehead, said, "don't weep anymore. I assure you that we will try and save you." Jennie's beautiful little face and frail little body looked all the more lovely to them, but they did not care to embrace too firmly for fear of causing her pain.⁷⁸

Such amazing shifts of allegiance and of feeling are well known in sexual fantasy, where they allow for the development of a special bond between torturer and victim. One would not be too surprised if Sam, gently stroking Jennie's neck, should suddenly tighten his grip, and strangle the little girl in his attempt to give her some "relief."

Similarly, it comes as no surprise to discover that in her dreams this little Vivian girl imagines herself the recipient of still more violent tortures.

Jennie was senseless and being unconscious she had another horrible dream, that of the rascal cutting off her toes, and covering her whole body with numerous cuts. She screamed shrilly from pain and terror, but enraged, the Glandelinian, to her horror and mortal agony sliced off all the muscles off her arm without mercy. Her screams was fairly deafening in reality, for the dream was so hideous that she screamed while unconscious. He She dreamed that he cut off her fingers, ears, and feet, then laying her down ripped her body open from top to bottom, not exposing intestines but soothy black stuff that spouted into the face of the Glandelinian killing him.⁷⁹

Darger makes use of the children's dreams as a means of achieving even greater extremes of violence, in which they, as dreamers, can be said to cooperate. Another of Jennie's dreams can therefore be used to lead us downward in our descent into Hell, since it introduces us to scenes of massacre.

That night, poor Jennie, having fallen asleep ... had a frightful dream ... She dreamed that all the massacres of the war was going on at one time. She dreamed that she saw millions of children tied up by the same number of soldiers in gray, tied up by the thumbs to the lower branches of trees, and mercilessly cut to pieces and sliced open, the intestines hanging down mingled with torrents of blood.

She dreamed that the wicked Glandelinians cut out their hearts, lungs, protruding tongues, and eyes, and also wound some of the intestines around her naked body until she believed they turned into writhing snakes ready to crush her. She even dreamed that they showered her with the hearts and lungs and forced pieces of it down her throat. Then she awoke sweating with horror her heart beating loud enough to make echoes in the gin house. Her sad look was heart rending, indescribable ... but poor Jennie, how pretty she looked despite all the misery. Weep on, dear children, Vengeance is nigh.⁸⁰

Massacre

For the Glandelinians, and for Darger, the ultimate form of sexual and aggressive release was achieved in a massacre, a spontaneous and uncontrolled bloodbath carried out on a vast scale. Aware of historical precedent, Darger occasionally stages such a grand spectacle in the form of the Glandelinian sack of a conquered city. What he seems to be seeking is an avalanche of unrestrained violence, violence carried to impossible extremes of random sadistic cruelty and murder in a situation of absolute chaos. The goal now is less the systematic imposition of pain than an orgy of murder and mutilation, a defiant challenge hurled at the sky.

Since the victims of these massacres are invariably Christian, and for the most part women and children, as well as priests, nuns, and the aged (adult males being away at war), Darger characterizes these assaults on innocent and helpless non-combatants as martyrdom. A typical example is the siege of Genitori which occurs in volume one, near the beginning of the war.⁸¹ We will begin with a long passage from this text in order to demonstrate the nature of Darger's associational process and unique style.

Terror was in the streets of Genitori, terror and rage, tears and frenzy, and miserable cries pealing through the air, desperation of the Glandelinians rushing to the slaughter, mothers with streaming eyes and wild and frenzied at seeing their children die. The crammed prisoners inside the city seemed about to burst so full were they with women and children.

Madness, murder and horror was committed by the enraged Glandelinians.

The far distant Glandelinian cannon was now roaring its loudest, with some five thousand children with eighty poor priests were forced along to the main prison by the Angry Glandelinian multitudes who were cursing and swearing as they moved. "Accursed priests this is the most terrible death you and the children are condemned to die," they howled. Many terrible reproaches and abuses these poor priests and children had to endure, and worse spoken in on them by frantic Glandelinians, and alas the next moment the prisoners were blocked and surrounded by raging endless tumults, in yells deaf to the cries for mercy and piteous streams or screams of the children which the Glandelinians only answered with sabre thrusts through the heart. The priests themselves were cut, hacked, and torn in pieces, and the children were frightfully massacred about the prison yards until their life blood covered the streets. Everywhere there was a howling tumult, the poor children being intermingled in a howling sea of gray coats. And under the arch of wild sabers, axes, bayonets, and pikes, and weapons of horrible torture, many of these poor little ones with even women and nuns sank hewn asunder. One after another sank with dying cries and soon there formed a pile of corpses and the streets began to run red.

Fancy the yells of these wicked Glandelinians, their faces covered with sweat and blood, the fiercer shrieks of more

women and children crying "Mercy, oh please have mercy." But there was no mercy. Any cowardly man may be even forced into battle, but the bravest heart would quail at this inhuman slaughter. Hundreds of women and children clasped each other spasmodically, and hung back, only to have their throats and breasts, and bellies ripped open. Many others thrown among the piles, and dying of thousands of wounds were only abused by the wicked Glandelinians who increased their torture by putting salt and pepper in their wounds. Child after child was cut down, men and women too by the wholesale, and onward and onward went the butchery, the loud yells of the Glandelinians wearing down into bass growls. The brave were not spared nor the beautiful, nor the weak, nor the rich, nor the poverty stricken, by these howling human fiends ...

In the captured city carts went along the streets full of stripped human beings, thrown pell-mell limbs sticking up, and yet hacked, badly and many headless and their bodies completely empty. Nay the same black boulder stones of the prisons had seen prison massacres before now, Glandelinians massacring christian women and children, whom they had imprisoned until now, and now they were piled heaps of carcasses, and the streets ran red with blood ... At the corner of Angeline street, the compressed yelpings of the frenzied Glandelinians became a continuous yell. Savage figures sprang on the tumbrill shafts first spray of a seemingly endless tide of human beings. Amid horrid noises

and tumult as of fierce wolves or demons, the other prisoners sank, massacred. All but eleven who escaped into houses and found mercy. The prisons and other prisoners they held were with difficulty saved. The stripped clothes were burned in big bonfires, while the naked corpses lay heaped up in the streets ...

Heaps of bodies of men, women, and children, lay in the gardens and courts of the palaces of Genitori, and most of the men were those who stood to defend the capital and other buildings. The sight of the bodies of the children were worse than ever seen in the slaughters during the beginning of the child slave rebellion. These too were cast upon the smouldering fires. Hundreds of all the corpses of the men, women and children, were being thrown upon the fire even when still alive, and these were bound with chains so that they could not get off. It was certainly awful ...

Great crowds of Glandelinians were pouring into the theaters and were filling up the cafes and eating up everything. Those who were not at these lootings were committing slaughters, pulling tongues out of children's mouths as they choked them, to add to the tortures. The smoke of those smouldering fires went up to the stars. As those eternal stars looked down upon Violet and her sisters in prison, on thousands of sacked homes, and desecrated churches, on drunkenness, and fierce revelry, and on agony of woe in which the prisons of Violet and her sisters had its awful share ...⁸²

Such savage massacres follow the capture of Christian cities or regions with regularity in *The Realms*. They emerge as epic moments in the war, standing out as unique events of much greater significance than the far more common set-piece battles with their equally balanced forces and curiously unemotional deaths numbering in the millions. They are memorable for the inhuman savagery of the attacks, and for the butchery of living and dead bodies. Suddenly Henry seems overwhelmingly aware of bodies and body parts heaped up everywhere. He is preoccupied by the extremely violent mutilation of corpses as a new source of brutality and excitement.

This excitement, which is Darger's own, is reflected in the writing style which conforms admirably to the chaos he is attempting to depict. The language, influenced by the poetic style of the Bible and the church, is at the same time disorganized, repetitive, and characterized by oddly inappropriate shifts from the trivial to the monstrous, with no clear perception of the difference.⁸³ Rich in vivid pictorial imagery, the texts also explore the sensory world of sound and smell. Overly concrete, his language is curiously lacking in depth of feeling. While he captures terror and rage, sharing in them vicariously, he fails to attain any degree of empathy or even of true tragedy.

WHILE MOST of his scenes of massacre take place outdoors, certain buildings and institutions become the focus of particular attention with horrifying events occurring inside. The most important settings are prisons, orphanages, and churches or other buildings housing priests and nuns. His prisons are unusual in containing large numbers of children, for the most part little girls. At the sack of Genitori, much of the action takes place in prisons.

Those who had the Glandelinian slaughter in charge, had granted the butchers, or rather assassins the permission to massacre all the new prisoners. The first victims were some mighty priests, and forty nuns who were butchered as badly as the innocent children, their own vitals fairly strewing the streets. Then the mob of assassins started slaughtering all those in prison. These Glandelinian butchers were led by general Swearing-To-Raise-Cain, a branded Glandelinian criminal and thief, a ferocious bully, and officer who led the Glandelinians in all these slaughters. Sometimes the Glandelinians would jab their sabers in the throats of the men women or children and rip clean to the chest down to the abdomen, tearing the intestines out and killing them in this horrible and shocking way. In all manners describable they committed these slaughters, assassinating without pity all the children who were in the prisons, cutting off their feet, cruelly choking or suffocating them, tearing out their eyes and tongues, and otherwise terribly mutilating them before they were cut to pieces and murdered, and forcing the children also to go

into the dark places where they would be afraid, or even throwing handfuls of spiders and centipedes upon the little girls terrifying them beyond endurance. This was a display of cruelty and fury of which the wildest beasts could not stand to do. Some of the prisoners, men women and children, were hurled out of the windows, one hundred feet high from the hard pavements of the streets, while yet alive, after being gashed badly and their tongues cut out, and eyes torn out, and the fall of each celebrated by hisses and whistlings. Some prisoners were burned alive, and all the images and pictures of all the saints of Christ. His own pictures of the Sacred Heart, and his Blessed Mother were hacked to pieces with them, or riddled with thousands of bullets.

While the emphasis in these scenes of massacre is on impersonal events occurring on a massive scale, Darger repeatedly shifts to individuals for brief moments, so as to highlight attacks of a particular savagery. These murderous assaults on the bodies of little girls are often matched with inappropriate or stereotypical affect, and expressions of banal sentimentality. It is in these passages that we encounter sexual fantasy of an extraordinarily perverse kind. But, while powerful sadistic impulses are certainly present, it is explosive rage which was being unleashed in the streets of Genitori and in Darger's psyche.

Two hapless pretty little girls in the penitentiary saw two fierce looking Glandelinians enter, their hands covered with blood, and armed with sabers, and a man with torches lighted them, and pointed to the hard stone beds of four little children who begged with pleading voices to spare them. The men paused but the officer cried, "Away with these christian dogs." They were cruelly massacred in the prison cell, while the other two little girls looked at each other in silence, and clasped each others hands with tearful eyes ... Tward five in the morning the grate which led to the cell of the little girls was opened anew. Four men in gray uniforms with drawn sabers and blazing torches came up near the corridor of the little girls preceded by an officer and slew the prisoners who were mostly children inside that room, fairly tearing out their very vitals. At this moment two others were dragged out into another hallway, and these were massacred and cut to pieces, and their vitals strewn on the floor ...

[...]

A crippled girl of the age of twelve years was also led to the hell gates of these slaughter prisoner prisons, and though she shivered back at the sight of the bloody sabers, she was too helpless to get away and she was dragged onward. Her fair head was cleft by the sabre, the neck was severed, and her fair body was cut in fragments, with indignities and horrors which human nature would fain find incredible. Her head with its ashen hue face and protruding tongue was fixed on

a pike, and paraded under the windows of the prisons that the rest of the still more hated crippled prisoners may see. The circuit of the prisons were guarded by Glandelinian officers, and the clamor and infinite tumult increased the terror ...

[...]

A very old man whose name was James Johnson was also doomed to die. But his very young daughter, very pretty and of ten years clasped him in her arms with an inspiring eloquence with a love which was stronger than very death, but the hearts of the hateful Glandelinians were not touched and she was the very first to die being burned at the stake in a slow and most torturous manner that human minds could think of. The bloody pikes rattled in a frightful manner and the tiger yells of the Glandelinians increased to ten fold. Happy it was that Violet and her sisters were not here to witness this ...

The Vivian Girls in Prison

While the Vivian girls may not have observed all of these events, they were certainly present at Genitori, locked, like so many princesses of legend, in a tower. It is of particular interest to see how Darger deals with them in this extravagant situation. They are the recipients of special treatment, and of demands or trials designed to exploit and test their singular abilities (11.6).

Usually when his heroines arrive on the scene the scale of destructive violence is much reduced, with Violet and her sisters functioning essentially as witnesses of the sufferings of others. On occasion, their failure to act, to intervene or come to the rescue, results in their appearing singularly ineffectual. In part, this is the result of the simple fact that they have to survive. However, it also seems that Darger had to reach a peak of excitement, near frenzy, before he could contemplate exposing these special little girls to the full intensity of Glandelinian violence. Real torment of these celestial beings usually occurs in retrospect, in the form of accounts of past events which happened when they were very much younger.⁸⁴ It is possible to sense a certain ambivalence in Darger's attitude toward these perfect children, as he describes the comparatively insignificant indignities which they are forced to endure. Is there perhaps an element of hypocrisy in his protestations of grief?

About noon a frenzied mob of Glandelinians came swarming for the prisons of Violet and her sisters. The standards they followed were the heads and even gashed bodies of six beautiful little children, with their intestines protruding from their bellies, and every one of these were

on pikes dripping with blood. Fortunately Violet and her sisters did not see this.

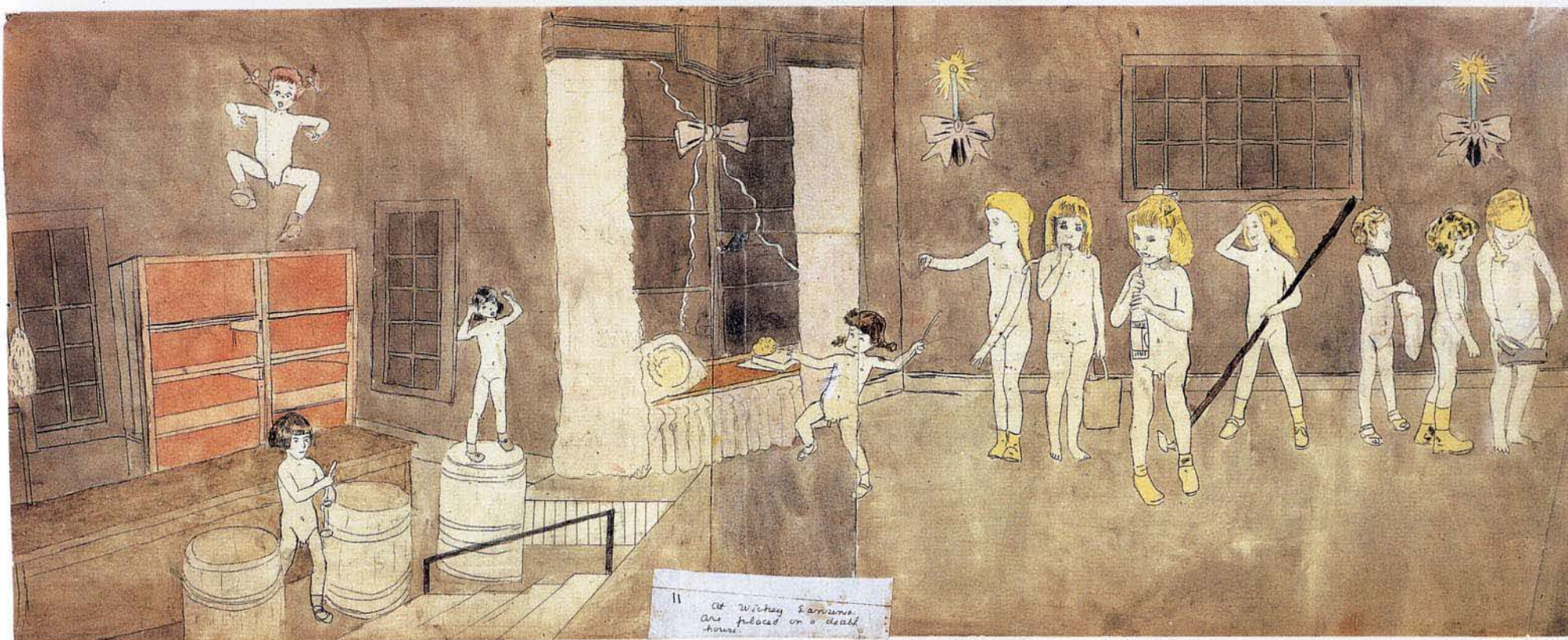
They were carried into the courtyards of the great prison under the window of that tower in which the Vivian girls were confined, and these yelling like demons demanded Violet and her sisters to appear, and when they did they thrust up on to their windows the heads and bodies of these lovely children, and managed to cast them inside among them. Then, bursting into the doors, they thrust the heads into their laps ordering them to make a copy of them in pencil ... And though it seemed as if they would die of horror they thought it best to obey, and as their arms were freed, and paper and pencils had been given to them, they started in to draw the hideous bodies and heads, being good at drawing pictures in the most perfect form and only taking them a few hours at that too. All the rest of the day and night the slaughters went on ...

Darger now plays in his imagination with various levels of reality and unreality. Having created the horrible situation in which the Vivian girls find themselves, he withdraws from it to imagine what it would have been like to actually be there with them, observing their sufferings. It is clear that he is there, in imagination, seeing everything. Yet, coyly, he insists that were he forced to witness such barbaric indignities forced on these celestial children, it "could be enough to make me insane with fury." He even maintains that he finds it almost impossible to write about it.

And what they [the Vivian girls] suffered in their horror for the others in suspense, and of the indignities no one can conjecture at all, neither myself. If I had the distress of seeing them in their captivity, of looking down from an upper window and beholding those celestial like Vivian girls more prettier than their dignity then ever I found, I yet could not describe it.

If I only could see the angelic Vivian girls by being with them, seeing them so real in their sorrows, as they moved to and fro, seemingly heedless of the curious who looked down upon them from every coign of vantage, and of the impudent guards, who gave themselves great pleasure, to spoil their airing by puffing their vile smoke into their faces as they passed them, saw them covered with blood from the bleeding bodies of children and hands thrown at them, saw the Vivian girls still in their very tenderest age of childhood, when they cannot free themselves from those chains, could be enough to make me insane with fury. There too, if I had seen that sweet saintly Father of theirs, I would tell him of their imprisonment. Had he known this he would have marched on Genitori right away and massacred all the Glandelinians.

My heart bleeds. I can write no more. So hastily as possible, I will come to their trial and marvelous escapeade.⁸⁵



11.6

Henry Darger

At Wickey Lansinia.

Are placed in a death

house. Collage-

drawing. Watercolor,

pencil, and carbon on

paper. 19 x 47 in.

Collection Robert M.

Greenberg, New

York. ©1998 Kiyoko

Lerner.

The ordeal of the Vivian sisters, swamped with body parts which they are required to draw, surpasses anything one could imagine encountering in fairy tales. Was Darger aware that he was passing beyond what any reader could readily accept? And in describing how they were forced to draw ghoulish pictures was he revealing his own inclinations? The image-making activity of the Vivian girls predates by many years his own involvement with drawing such scenes, but evidently the idea of such pictures was present long before he created his collage-drawings of massacres. On several occasions in *The Realms* he describes the Vivian girls actually creating pictures, which *he* later painted.⁸⁶ In his own mind he could maintain that these images were the work of the children and actually executed in the Realms of the Unreal. In this strange way he could justify the depiction of such unconventional subjects, and deny his own responsibility. Again and again, we see this blurring of identity as he and the little girls all but merge.

It is striking that he imagines the children drawing in conditions of extreme violence and emotional tension. To what extent were his own images, drawn so many years later, also executed in the context of intense emotion, arousal, or unbearable excitement? Faced with such painful visions he says he can write no more. What would be required before he, like the Vivian sisters, would find himself able to draw such scenes with equanimity?



11.7

Henry Darger

*At Julio Callio - via
Norma. From windows
Vivian girls witness
harrowing and blood-
curdling scenes.
Collage-drawing.
24 x 38 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.*

The Iconography of Violence

The childlike innocence of much of Darger's art, even when depicting scenes of terror between children and adults, suggests that much of the time he was inhibited in expressing all that was within him, at least in visual terms. On occasion, although he wanted to depict events of extreme violence he felt unable to do so. An example is the collage-drawing *At Julo Callio — via Norma*, which he describes as follows: *From windows Vivian girls witness harrowing and bloodcurdling scenes* (11.7). But the picture merely depicts a bright yellow interior, the corner of a room with two huge windows. Twelve children including all seven Vivian sisters are present, although none of them appears to be looking out of the windows through which all that can be seen is blue sky. Darger has depicted no landscape, no buildings, and certainly no harrowing scenes of violence or bloodshed. He has, nevertheless, made a slight effort to modify the facial expressions of the children to suggest shock or horror. We are left to imagine what it is they would see if they were to look down below at the massacre. His explanation, "too terrible to be pictured," is added to the inscription.

A second, and more extreme, instance of avoiding the violent subject matter implied by the picture label is seen in the collage-drawing *At Norma Catherine. Are forced to witness a frightful massacre of children and witness their bowels and other entrails torn out by infuriated Glandelinians* (11.8). One would anticipate an extremely violent picture literally dripping with gore. Instead we are confronted with a gentle landscape filled with children at play in a stretch of grassy meadow beside a placid river in which trees and bushes are reflected. Flowers,

including the giant "Deliric flower," are in bloom beneath a tranquil blue sky. The Vivian girls are present, identified only by their blond hair. Several children hold onto balloons. The only sign of anything untoward is that some of the children are child slaves. Five little girls are naked, while others are dressed in gray slave outfits. This might have been intended as one of many pictures in which the Vivian princesses help slaves to escape. In the far distance, on the opposite shore of the river, there is a Glandelinian encampment; but the few troops visible are standing around doing nothing. The only hint of possible future danger is a man sitting high up on the branch of a tree (top left corner) from which a short length of rope hangs down. Perhaps a hanging is in the offing. To see anything more, we must see with Darger's eyes, looking at a peaceful scene of children at play and seeing a bloodbath. The massacre he tells us about takes place only in his mind. At this stage, was he actually unable to depict truly monstrous events in graphic images, or was it simply that he had not yet found the way?

What is clear is that his written descriptions were invariably derived from internal images of an essentially pictorial nature. His writing invariably reflects visions, and is intensely visual and sensory. In a real sense he writes like a visual artist, describing scenes of absolute terror which at least initially he seems to have resisted illustrating.

As the christians reached the town of Blander those going through saw that the retreating enemy had massacred all the child slaves, for they were found lying in the streets brutally mutilated ... The air of the abandoned town smelled of death and the scene was frightfully horrible. The

number of children slain was about 10,000 — 1000 of whom were boys and the rest girls.

Violet and her sisters had been with these soldiers who were going through this town, and saw on a curb on which lay a little naked shapeless heap, and they horrified looked down on the face of a little girl. She was not more than five years of age, there being a glimpse of white beneath the long curving lashes of her still White lips. A curl of soft brown hair lay over her cheek half hiding a wicked cut, and except for that the blemished face was untouched and calm ...

Violet and her sisters had recoiled covering her eyes staggering back half fainting at the sight. "We can't stand it," they cried. "She's like my own little girl friends, who we have loved so dearly and lost." The little body indeed was twisted and mangled a gaping cut almost a foot wide exposing everything inside the child ran from shoulder to navel. A small round leg had been crushed almost into a pulp from knee to foot, and her arm was torn and blood covered. "That ain't what human beings do," said another Abbieannian with a curse. "It's the deed of fiends in human form" ... In utter silence the white faced shaking Vivian girls forced themselves away from the horrible sight.⁸⁷

11.8

Henry Darger

At Norma Catherine.

Are forced to witness
a frightful massacre
of children and
witness their bowels
and other entrails
torn out by infuriated
Glandelinians.

Collage-drawing.
19 x 47 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



TO DEPICT the terrifying world of his visions in actual pictures, Darger had to go beyond anything available to him in the various kinds of popular imagery which provided his usual sources. While scenes of extraordinary violence are not unknown in the history of religious art (for example, the damned in Hell being tormented), it is unlikely that he had much familiarity with such pictures. While his Catholic background might appear to justify disturbingly graphic scenes of death and mutilation, the kinds of religious images available in his local church provided no models of violent subject matter.⁸⁸ Possible exceptions would have been vividly realistic depictions of the scourged body of Christ as man of sorrows, or representations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Darger had, therefore, to conceive of an iconography that did not exist, to find means of bringing adults and naked children together in new and unaccustomed juxtapositions, and to acquaint himself with internal anatomy so as to plausibly represent bodies cut open and disemboweled. Apart from the formal problems this presented, there were the normal psychological inhibitions which usually stand in the way of depicting material in which the bodies of children are savagely violated.

One of the great massacres in *The Realms of the Unreal* was that which occurred at Phelantonburg.⁸⁹ Although short, the initial account of this event was carefully constructed, building slowly in intensity. One senses a striving for greater and greater horror, both in terms of the number of children killed, and what was being done to them. Darger has abandoned any pretense that this massacre included victims other than children.

All the while now during the battle of Carnaval a reign of terror had went on in the city of Phelantonburg. Even the streets of every small town captured in the immediate vicinity were filled with dead children and now the massacres were threatening to spread throughout the whole western portion of the country in the hands of the enemy. General Vivian who was advancing on the city was shocked when he heard of this wholesale butchery of children ...

It was one of the greatest and most shocking massacres that had ever occurred thus far. The horrors were indescribable. The children seized from their frantic mothers were killed in all ways imaginable. Many were burned to death at the stake, and others were cut to pieces and left lying where they had been thrown, and many children looked as if they had gone through the meat chopper. Even little girls from the ages of nine, eight, and younger were tied down stark naked and a spade full of red hot live coals would be laid on their bellies. Many of the children had been choked to death with as it seemed iron hands for the looks on their faces were horrid. Indeed the screams and pleads of the victims could not be described and thousands of mothers went literally insane over the scene or even committed suicide. Even one Glandelinian soldier told his commissioned officer that he still carried a child heart in his coat pocket, and produced it to give proof.

About nearly 56,789 children were literally cut up like a butcher does a calf after being strangled or slain in all ways, and indeed the sights of the bloody windrows with their intestines exposed or gushing out was a sight that no one could bear to witness without losing their reason. Hearts of children were hung by strings to the walls of houses. So many of the bleeding bodies had been cut up that they looked like they had gone through a machine of knives, and one street was covered with a sea of dead children's bodies and mangled fragments of every vital describable. In the curbing of the streets and at some points along the sidewalks blood lay like water after a thunderstorm.⁹⁰

For anyone reading these accounts of the mass slaughter of children, or examining the related illustrations, the horror is to some extent relieved by the perception that these are somehow the fantasies of a child. In terms of their origin, this perception is probably correct, in that they show every sign of belonging to early periods in Darger's life, emerging first in his adolescent and even pre-adolescent imagination. They lack any contribution from adult sexuality. They are not, however, mere memory traces. This was the kind of fantasy which lingered in the mind of a much older Darger, indeed throughout his life, evidence of a fairly complete fixation at an early phase of development.⁹¹ It was the unchanging nature of these fantasies, and their continuing ability to awaken excitement, which made it possible for Darger to illustrate texts written years earlier with no loss of intensity. Despite the passage of thirty years or more between the writing of the description of the Phelantonburg massacre and its

depiction in two pictures, there appears to have been no change in the intensity of excitement. The drawings do not seem to reflect "emotion recollected in tranquility," but rather the externalization of living fantasy content. The persistence of excitement in the process of drawing is particularly evident in the collage-drawing *At Phelantonburg. What they saw* (11.9).⁹²

This picture, which may have been left partially unfinished, is of particular importance in that it probably represents an early attempt at illustrating a scene of massacre.⁹³ The lack of any enlarged figures of children may imply a date prior to 1946. Intended as a representation of one of the most violent massacres in *The Realms*, the drawing is surprisingly restricted to scenes of strangulation. Successful in illustrating the lines "Many of the children had been choked to death with as it seemed iron hands for the looks on their faces were horrid," it fails to deal with all the other monstrous events and images described in the text. However, shifting the scene backward in time, it depicts the violent assault actually taking place, rather than viewing the fate of the children in retrospect. As a result there is a dramatic increase of emotional intensity.

The drawing is astonishingly primitive both in form and composition, providing evidence of two distinct factors contributing to, and complicating, this early attempt to depict violence in graphic form. Faced with the task of representing a scene of massacre, in which it was necessary to invent much that couldn't be obtained by borrowing, he was forced to experiment with freehand drawing. Although the little girls have been traced from various sources, the tracing is unusually rudimentary, and many details have been modified.

The line seems rushed, even careless. This is particularly evident in the drawing of abdomen, genitals, hands and arms. Anxious to capture the children's struggles to free themselves from the "iron hands," Darger is driven to invent new hand and arm positions. In order to depict violent acts of strangulation he has modified each child's face to suggest acute anxiety and lack of air. While flesh in this picture has been left unpainted, he has provided the faces of the suffocating girls with rich color, a range of deep pinks and purples touched with red detail. The most impressive of these portrayals of asphyxiation is the large doll-like image of a child slave in the left corner. She is being strangled by a huge pair of Glandelinian hands which, in the absence of a body, simply reach into the composition from its outer edge (see illustration 1.3). Obsessed with the inner experience of suffocation, he has carefully elaborated the child's face: the staring eyes from which tears flow, the open mouth and protruding tongue, and the deep mauve color of her skin.

But, while the bodies of the victims have for the most part been borrowed and traced, some though not all of the sadistic adults are the result of pure invention. Determined to suggest the violent activity and emotional intensity of these Glandelinian monsters he was driven to abandon tracing in favor of crude freehand attempts to depict furious facial expressions and active poses. The result, especially in the background figures, is oddly stiff, wooden, and lacking in expression. One surprising detail is the presence of two Glandelinian women in full-length gowns represented in the act of strangling two little girls. In her valiant efforts to escape, one of these children accidentally reveals her male genitals beneath her little dress.

Despite marvelous details such as this the drawing as a whole is weak, reminiscent of the drawing style of an adolescent boy attempting to come to grips with "realistic" representation. But, in recognizing this, we may be touching on another, far more significant, factor at work in this strange picture: a loss of control which is the result of extreme excitement. Overstimulated by the violent and unaccustomed subject matter of his drawing, Darger may have regressed to primitive levels of feeling and drawing ability belonging to much earlier stages in his development. In attempting to approach the task of representing such unique subjects, he had not only to find new forms and iconography, he had also to withstand levels of excitement which would usually preclude drawing altogether. This admittedly weak but exciting drawing reflects a partial failure to cope with both of these unfamiliar and difficult requirements.

11.9

Henry Darger

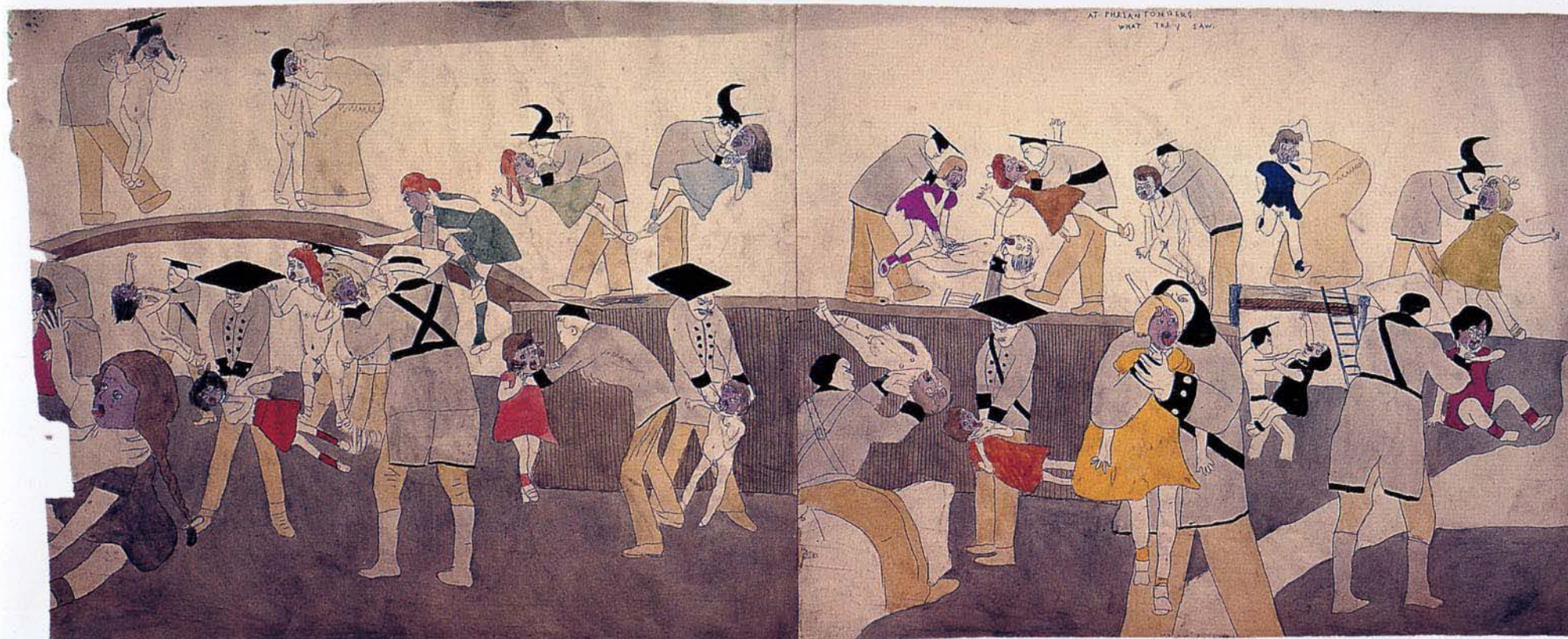
At Phelantonburg.

What they saw.

Collage-drawing.

19 x 46 in. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.



11.10

Henry Darger*Phelantonburg. What
they saw no 2.*Collage-drawing,
19 x 47 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

THE COLLAGE-DRAWING *What they saw no 2*, which may be a sequel to the picture we have just examined, represents an amazing advance in the objective depiction of massacres, and in the illustration of a specific text (11.10). Set in the countryside rather than the city, it nevertheless captures the chaotic excitement and violence which we associate with the Phelantonburg massacre. The strangely luminous landscape with its storm-tossed black sky, emerald-green grass, and bizarre landforms is a deeply subjective vision of nature called into being by the unique requirements of the systematized slaughter of children. Most unexpected, and oddly reminiscent of early Italian landscape painting, are the irregularly shaped earthen slabs which project out of the ground like giant potato chips. Irrational tombstones for the living, these vertical landforms, silhouetted against the moist sky and illuminated by jagged streaks of lightning, serve as supports for the thirteen small witnesses of this great event. Affixed by ropes to the slabs, these living children watch what is being done to their friends and quietly await their fate. At the center of the composition an earthen mountain towers above the scene, its top a jagged form like a mutilated hand pointing upward, its bare slopes graced by a single tree.

Unlike the earlier portrayal of Phelantonburg this version of the massacre boasts an elaborate and firmly structured composition, and truly magnificent color which literally glows against the subtle washes of the deep gray sky. Below the central peak a perfect arch of struggling figures echoes the slopes above. Composed of the bodies of six children grappled by five adults, it rises to curve across the picture plane and terminates in two

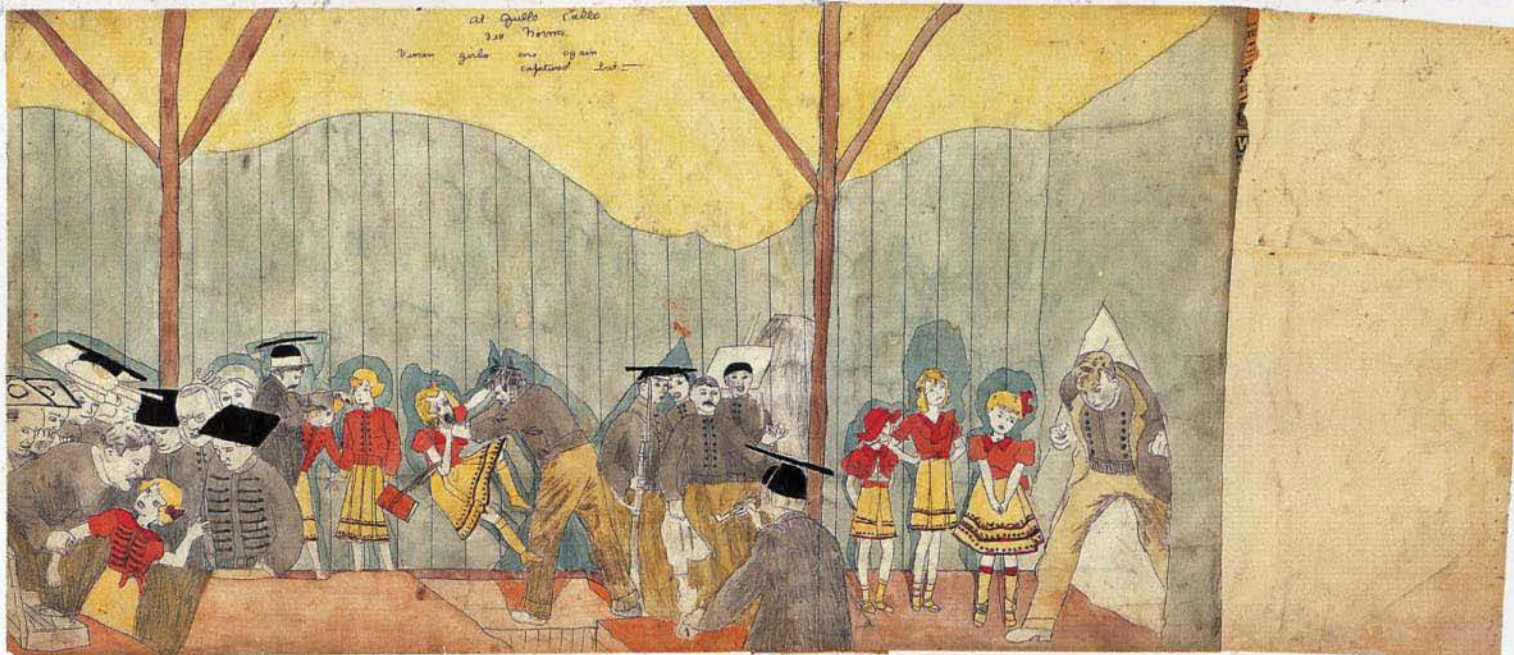
reclining bodies, one that of a simple little girl spreadeagled in the grass, her eyes not closed but staring wide in death. An arrow with blue Glandelinian feathers protrudes from her chest. She has been cut open and a tiny neat pile of intestines sits upon her abdomen above her tiny penis.

To the left and right sides of the composition, individual Glandelinians are arranged with more space around them so as to allow for more inventive methods of strangulation. These involve energetic adults and wildly active children whose bodies in some cases freely sail through the air, in contrast to the bound forms arranged in a stolid row behind them, and to the motionless bodies of the dead which are arranged like still-life compositions at their feet.

Abandoning freehand drawing of the foe, Darger has found wonderfully active and precise models to represent the violent activity of the soldiers, successfully juxtaposing borrowed children and adults in marvelously inventive groupings full of movement. Some of the men attempt to deal with two children at once, in one case by hanging two of them from his rifle with ropes around their necks. Another little girl similarly attached is jerked from her feet and hurled naked into the air, her arms and legs akimbo, her red braids flying. An obvious experiment is the child, her back to us, who hangs suspended by her thumbs from ropes which descend unexplained from the sky. Her head, tipped backwards in agony or death, appears upside down.

Arranged across the left foreground are a series of disemboweled corpses, the eviscerated bodies of children described in the text. But how much more real they appear in pictorial form. At left is a still-life of head, severed arms, and fragments of an opened trunk arranged in random order. Below this, the chest cavity and abdomen of a little girl have been exposed by the careful cutting away of the entire front of her body, which has been lifted off like the lid of a covered dish, and placed below the trunk where her legs used to be. Her internal organs have simply disappeared. Beyond her, another child has been nailed, in a sitting position, to a jerry-built wooden structure, which serves to support and display her opened body with its anatomical details carefully diagramed. Added to Darger's obsession with strangulation is a no less intense preoccupation with the interior of the body and with the mutilation of corpses. Hauntingly beautiful is the child at center whose arms and upper trunk are encased in bandages, while her lower body has been torn open and exposed. This is a complex form, difficult to grasp or to explain. This was an extraordinarily pretty little girl, now dead, her face a simple but memorable study of peace and calm, a touching reminder of a child's vulnerability.

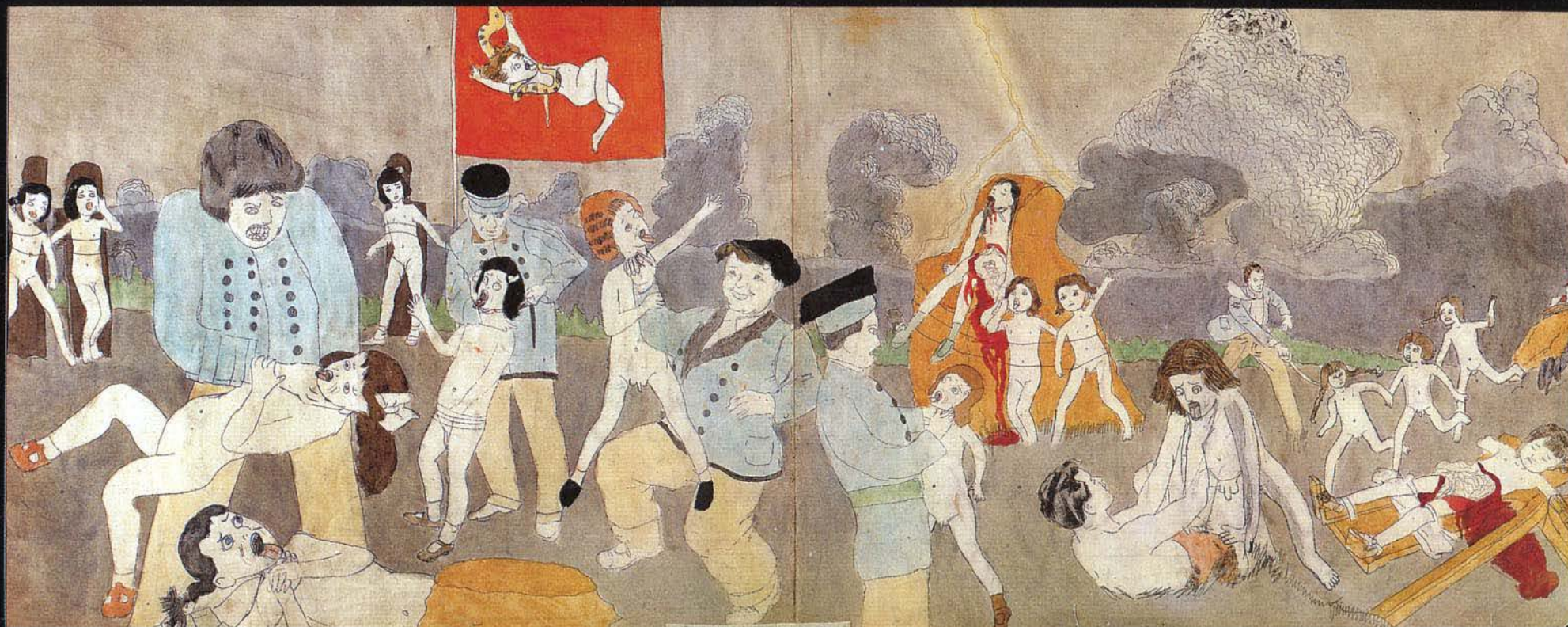
All of these children lie on green grass which contrasts strangely with the pools of red blood forming beneath them, an allusion perhaps to the blood which "lay like water after a thunderstorm." Darger has come to grips with his subject in all its intensity, finding graphic images which in their blunt realism surpass the horrifying character of the text, giving concrete and convincing form to once internal images of sadism and murder.



11.11 left
Henry Darger
At Jullo Callo via Norma. Vivian Girls are again captured but —. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on paper. 19 x 44 3/4 in. Collection Robert M. Greenberg, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



11.12 left, bottom
Henry Darger
15 At Wickey Lansinia. Christians come to rescue. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing on paper. 19 x 44 3/4 in. Collection Robert M. Greenberg, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



11.13 right

Henry Darger

Title unavailable

[Scene of violent
massacre]. Collage-

drawing. 19 x 47 in.

Collection Sam and

Betsey Farber,

New York. ©1998

Kiyoko Lerner.

The Massacre at Calmanrinia

As we move from massacre to massacre in *The Realms*, and there is usually at least one in each volume, there are obvious repetitions. Even the same phrases occur, evidence that the material reflects the tendency of images and evocative words employed in sexual fantasy to be used again and again with little change. There are, however, totally new sadistic inventions on each occasion, which suggest that Darger was inventing new sexual fantasies, not just drawing on material from childhood. Behind these fantasies one senses not only rage, but deep anxiety which was masked by the constant fantasy activity. What is not clear is what external or internal events provoked sudden explosive outbursts of tremendous sadistic violence in the midst of hundreds of pages of relatively calmer fantasy material dealing with events in the lives of the children or of the war. The massacre at Calmanrinia is unusual in beginning as a more systematized torture scene involving child slaves, and then erupting into the uncontrolled violence of a massacre. It allows us to observe his growing excitement, culminating in an explosive loss of control at least in fantasy. It was also unique in inspiring a whole series of illustrations of a single event.

"The Dreadful Massacre at Calmanrinia"

Three more days had passed and then as the christian armies came up and started a siege a great massacre occurred. First children were tortured in horrible manner, scourged, and tormented in all horrible ways. Indescribable was the terror among the children and the suffering of those tortured was worse than we could even think. It was the intention of the foe to get ahead of the christians and scaring them into raising the siege by massacring the children who were slaves. Many of the children were choked to death the children dying with their tongues sticking out so far that it looked funny to the Glandelinians. Children were even bound hand and foot and thrown on coal furnaces and their death screams was deafening their suffering seeming to be like the agony of a damned soul before they ceased their vehement struggles and died. Nowhere was there a friendly face to comfort the children or any one there to rescue them and their screams had told how they suffered.

The Glandelinians even made cuts on the tender bodies of little children and threw salt and pepper into the wounds and into their eyes. Children during other days had even been starved to death and refused water until they died of thirst. Many children had even been kept awake until they died. Children were even killed by the Glandelinians turning a stream of scalding hot water on them. Their screams were deafening but the scalding was fatal and they quickly died in mortal agony. Children were even killed by the Glandelinians sewing their eyes lids open so they could not close them and locking them in rooms whose ceiling was covered with millions of blinding lights. This torture drove them insane and then they died. Children were even drowned and smothered in water or by rags tied around their nose and mouth. The Glandelinians had only laughed at their convulsions for air and made it worse by holding them so they could not struggle. Hundreds of child slaves were tortured this way. Their suffering for want of air could be seen after they died by the ghastly look in their faces.



11.14
Henry Darger
At Calmanrinia.
Strangling and beating
children to death.
Collage-drawing.
19 x 47 in. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

While the massacre was continuing for over a day already the advance guard of Huebaum Manley's army was then about twenty miles away and even those of the other two Manleys, Bicknell, Calmannia, Shoemannia and Federal, were retreating toward Calmanrinia ... This caused the massacre to increase in fury and the torture of the children also. Children by thousands were hung by their thumbs. These children suffered horribly but they were left to die that way. The Glandelinians had jerked on the ropes to increase their suffering and when the children died after hanging that way for three days they were taken down. Over three hundred children were tortured to death this way. A hundred other children were tortured to death. Children in unknown numbers were even hanged to death.⁹⁵

11.15
Henry Darger
At Calmanrinia.
Strangling and
beating children to
death. Detail.
Collage-drawing.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



We have already examined an illustration of this massacre in discussing Darger's obsession with various forms of suffocation: *Strangling children by revenge of defeat in battle* (see 11.3). It is probable that his initial attempts to depict a massacre in visual terms were limited to relatively bloodless scenes emphasizing strangulation. While this may have been the result both of a lack of drawing skill, and of psychological inhibition, it is, nonetheless, true that in all of his written descriptions of mass torture and killing he returned again and again to various forms of suffocation, and in particular to the direct physical contact involved in choking a child. One wonders if this was the culminating fantasy leading to orgasm, or whether, with the passage of time, he required far more extreme events to obtain release.⁹⁶

Strangely, the illustrations associated with this massacre actually provide evidence of such a shift in internal necessity. A collage-drawing entitled *At Calmanrinia. Strangling and beating children to death* is devoted almost entirely to large and marvelously varied depictions of adult Glandelinians throttling little girls, seven of whom are blonde and may be Vivian sisters (11.14). As with the picture referred to above, this one too is pale in color, a study in washed-out blues, beige, and yellows, with the bodies of the children left uncolored. Once again we have a *mélange* of carefully traced adults, including gun-wielding cowboys in stetsons, and wonderfully primitive Glandelinians drawn freehand by Darger. Unusually large children twist and writhe in the grasp of their tormenters, their flailing bodies filling the composition with dynamic movement.

At far right, a little girl turned upside down is being strangled by a knife-wielding soldier who is about to slash her open, though not a drop of blood is spilled. Stretched out on the ground below is another little girl with red hair, her fully extended body that of a youthful adolescent boy with perfectly formed male genitals. Unique to this picture is another dead child, with closed eyes, who drifts gently through the air above the scene, as if asleep in death.

However, at some point this masterful and fully completed composition ceased to satisfy Darger. We have no way of knowing how much time intervened before he made a striking change in his original conception, adding a collage cut-out: three little girls who have been cut open, and the front of their bodies removed, so as to display their internal anatomy (11.15). It is evident that he has borrowed anatomical diagrams from a biology book, and inserted them into the bodies of children obtained from another more innocent source. Blood is everywhere, flowing over the mutilated bodies and collecting in crimson pools below. Thick red paint has begun to function for Darger as actual blood. A complete set of intestines, which doesn't belong to any of the three victims, is arranged on the ground. Two of the children have white rags bound around mouth and nose, a clear reference to the text.

Darger simply cut this fragmentary composition, in two pieces, out of another picture, one of his own, and glued it into the foreground of this work, a troubling addition of extreme violence and color. Seemingly, he had learned in the interval how to represent levels of sadism and mutilation undreamt of when he was painting the original picture. His need for blood had increased.

ANOTHER PICTURE in the Calmanrinia series bears two inscriptions: *At Calmanrinia they see little children being strangled to death* and *At Calmanrinia torturing children by strangulation* (11.16). Once again, the main theme was originally limited to strangulation. But, there is an unusual intimacy in some of the details, particularly evident in two male figures so closely placed to either side of a naked little girl as to suggest an embrace into which she has been inserted as a shared sexual object. Another naked child is being shared by three officers, one of whom is comfortably ensconced in a large armchair. All sixteen children in the original drawing are dead or being killed by various forms of strangulation. Then, once again, it seems that Darger felt compelled to add an additional collage segment borrowed from a far more violent painting. In the top right corner, he has attached a small-cut out fragment in which we see three little girls being tormented in unexpected ways. One has been affixed to a large cross. A second is bound to an upright plank and has just had her abdomen cut open by an adult figure, sword in hand. A third child, stretched out on a makeshift table, is being sawed in half by two Glandelinians who share an enormous two-handed saw. Her feet have already been removed, and vast amounts of blood flow from her body. It would seem that at a specific point in time Darger came to feel it was necessary to modify previously existing compositions in this way, immeasurably increasing the level of violence and of blood.



11.16

Henry Darger

*At Calmanrina they see
little children being
strangled to death.*

Collage-drawing.

Watercolor, pencil,
carbon tracing on
paper. 18 1/4 x 35 3/4 in.
Collection Robert M.
Greenberg, New York.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

A similar, but much more sudden, shift can be observed in the writing, an overwhelming intensification in the character of the assaults on the body, with emphasis on mutilation and the disembowelment of corpses. This was an abrupt change, evidence, I believe, of an instantaneous internal development, as though all artistic inhibitions have snapped; in the absence of control a psychopathic and irrational killer has emerged.

The massacre continued for still another day. Children were dispatched in the most horrible manner. Their intestines were cut out the Glandelinians even pelting their victim with them. Children were commanded to eat the hearts of the dead children and those who refused were tortured beyond describing. The children were fairly bathed in blood. Scores upon scores of poor children were cut to pieces, after being strangled to death, and even their organs were hung on trees. Children were forced to swallow the sliced fragments of dead children's hearts.

Nearly three quarters of the number of children who were massacred died first by strangulation, their eyes and protruding tongues were extracted, their bodies opened and their entrails pulled out and their bodies hacked and torn and left lying in that condition on the streets and pavements. Blood dripping corpses were fairly hung from windows or stuck on posts and pikes. Children by the score per minute were scourged to death also being struck by horrible whips made of rubber, rope, or leather, and also elastic rubber whips with horrible iron spiked lashes at the ends, and the lashes torn their flesh

until they were covered with gore. Within three days the sliced up bodies of the helpless innocents lay strewn by thousands, the blood lying in puddles.

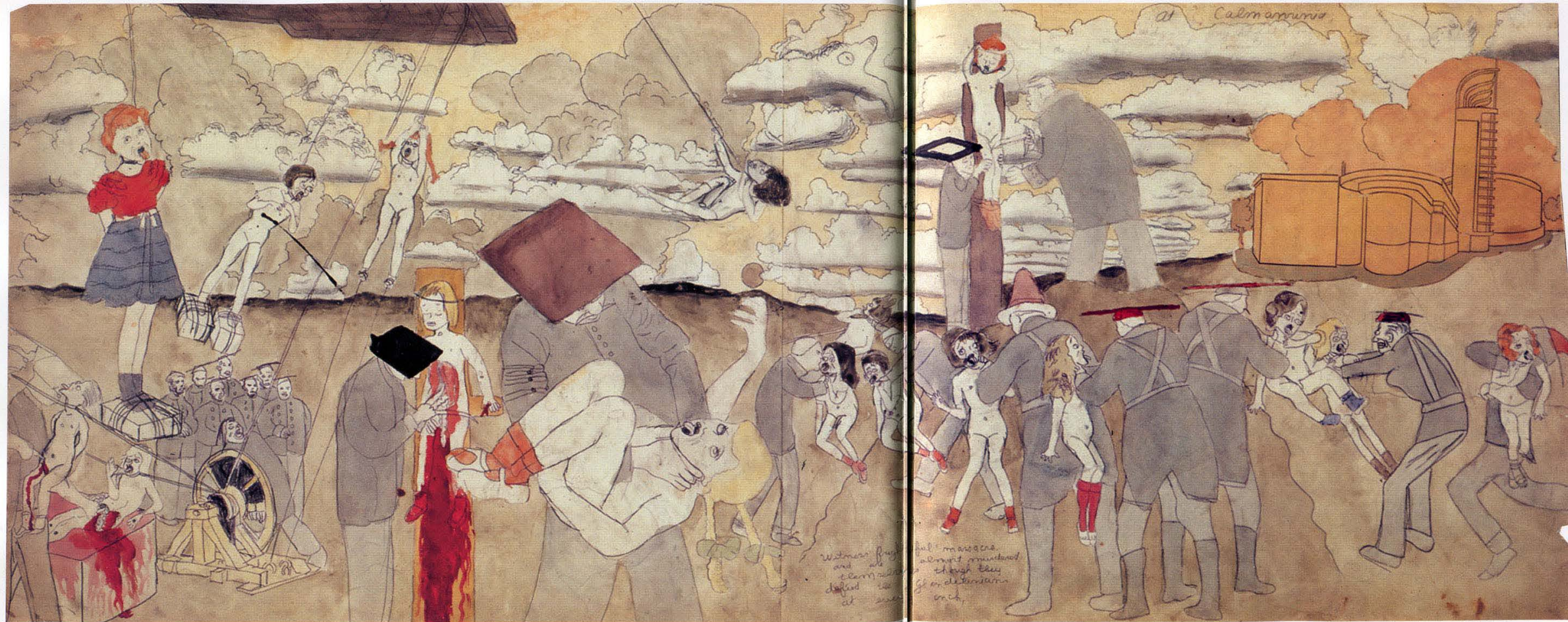
The massacre was equally as horrible as witnessed at Phelantonburg only a greater number were being assassinated. The whole square was covered with the blood from the butchered children and many dead children still whole in body lay among them that were mangled while the blood of the corpse dropped into their open mouths and some of the entrails even lay across their faces their whole bodies being besmeared with the dripping blood of those lying on top of them. Everywhere during the massacre was heard the piercing screams of the victims. The Glandelinians looked like the very devils themselves, every minute the children being killed by scores with their hands tied up behind them.

THE FINAL collage-drawing in a set of four, *At Calmanrinia witness frightful massacre*, provides an outstanding example of what was possible once Darger's customary defenses had been laid aside and he became free to portray the darker visions troubling his imagination (11.17). The scene is set in a flat and featureless landscape. The disk of a strangely dark sun resting on the horizon illuminates a cloud-filled yellow sky. A fantastic building, at far right, obviously borrowed from science fiction, suggests that we are in another world, as does a tiny spaceship floating high in the darkening sky. One of the clouds assumes the form of an animal with open mouth, an example of the "cloud images" commonly

encountered in some of the more violent pictures. This landscape is unusual in the way it seems to respond to the monstrous events which are taking place in it; the setting sun will soon bathe the whole world in blood.

Twenty Glandelinians in full uniform are occupied with the torture and mutilation of seventeen little girls. As a rare departure from military convention Darger has introduced blood-red mortarboard hats, a tribute either to the strength of the dying sun, or to the murderous nature of this group of officers. The child victims are, of course, naked (with one fully clothed exception), but wear brilliantly colored socks and shoes. This feature, usually explained as evidence of Henry's inability to draw feet, seems to emphasize the nakedness of the little girls, and may actually be a sexual fetish derived from Darger's erotic imagination. At right, seven children, their small bodies thrashing in the air, are caught in the crushing grip of their tormenters. The theme of strangulation is further reinforced by a very large Glandelinian soldier and his gasping victim, just left of center. These beautifully interlocked figures, especially the blonde child with her legs drawn up, reflect Darger's new-found ability to exploit and integrate borrowed forms in terms of his very personal requirements.

Making use of sadistic fantasies involving elaborate imaginary machines, he introduces an unusual hanging scene in which a large winch is used to lift four little girls into the air.⁹⁷ The children, including a large girl neatly attired in a red blouse and blue skirt, are not only suspended from ropes tied around their necks, but appear to whirl through the air, as if on a bizarre variant of an amusement park whirligig. In Glandelinian terms this is



11.17
Henry Darger
At Calmanrinia.
 Witness frightful mas-
 sacre and are almost
 murdered themselves,
 though they defied the
 Glandelinians at every
 inch. Collage-drawing.
 19 x 47 1/2 in.
 Collection of Robert
 M. Greenberg, New
 York ©1998 Kiyoko
 Lerner.

exactly what this massacre is, an entertaining way of passing an evening. A small group of officers cluster around the machine solemnly watching the circling figures.

The entertainment grows more and more extreme. At far left, two children, their necks also attached by ropes to the winch, have been disemboweled. Their mutilated bodies with intestines scattered lie in pools of blood. Very unusual for Darger is the depiction of a stream of blood issuing from the genital area of one of the girls, a hint at castration in a scene which includes no male genitals. Elsewhere in the picture the act of evisceration is actually depicted. Two vertical slabs have been set up, and a child attached to each. Events unfolding here depict two stages in the process. On the horizon, two huge figures are arranged to either side of a wooden slab that is silhouetted against the sky. A naked child is suspended on this simple structure. While one figure grasps her legs to steady the still-living victim, the other, a looming giant, inserts a blade in preparation for the upward stroke which will open the body from abdomen to neck. This is unusually explicit even for Darger. In the foreground, a second child, attached to a rudimentary cross by nails through her hands, has been totally opened, and a curiously calm and intent Glandelinian is engaged in removing the internal organs. From the gaping wound a sea of blood flows down the cross.

Given the amount of blood, and the emphasis not only on various forms of strangulation, but on crucifixion, evisceration, and mutilation of corpses, it is clear that this picture represents a new level of savagery expressed in graphic terms. A major advance in Darger's ability to represent extremes

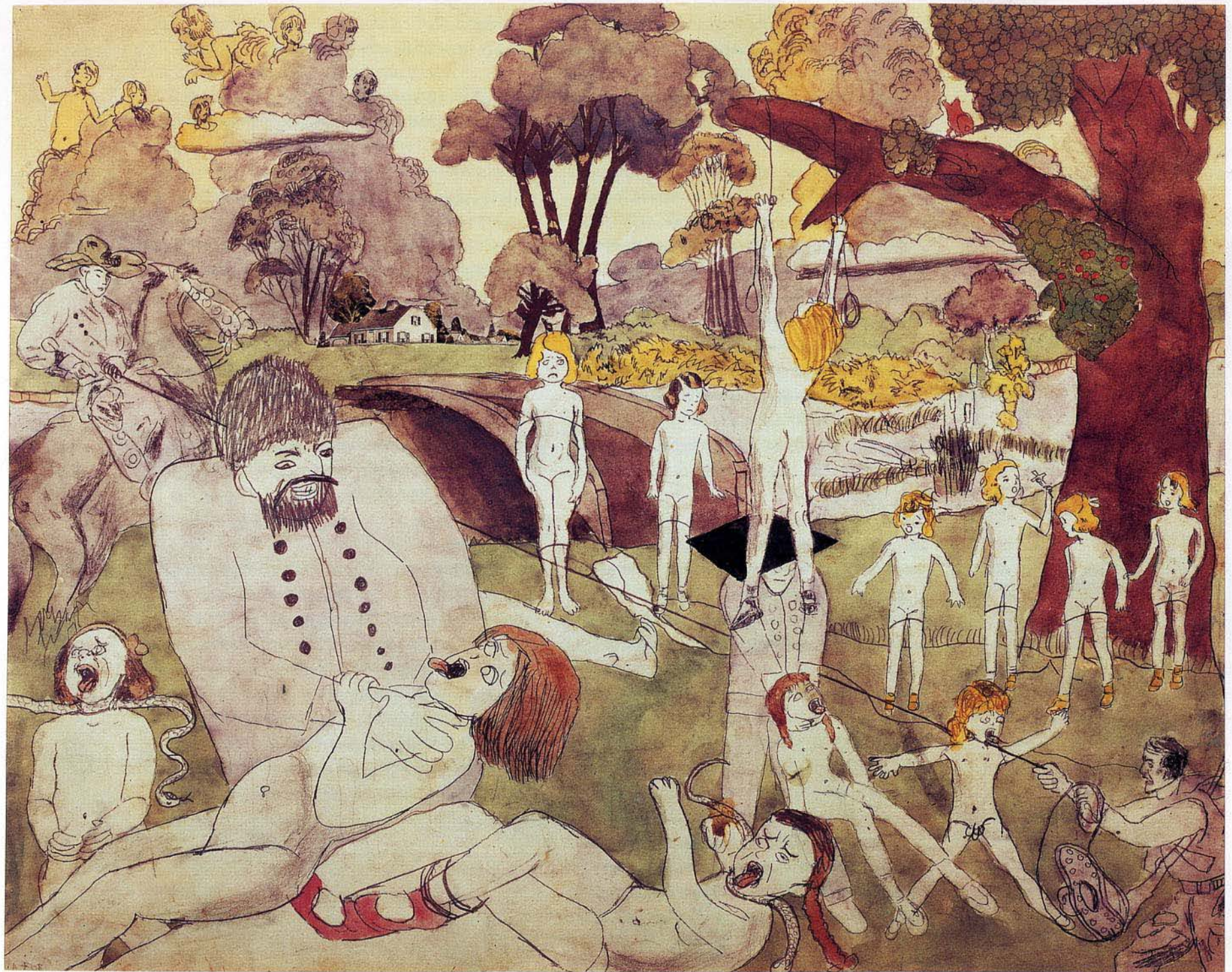
of human brutality directed at children, it may also involve a significant psychological regression, in that the shift from verbal description to pictorial images brings him closer to the visual constructs of sadistic fantasy. This, despite the fact that the greater concreteness of images might seem to represent a step closer to reality and the possibility of action.

What is difficult to determine is the extent to which the sudden emergence of such images may have represented a loss of control and a weakening of Darger's customary defenses, as opposed to providing evidence of a strongly functioning ego able to withstand the confrontation with raw and undiluted primitive images emerging unhindered from the id. These contrasting possibilities, which are not necessarily contradictory, are illustrated in pictorial terms in the image itself. On the one hand, this is a curiously slow and ritualized massacre in which acts of extraordinary cruelty are carried out with deliberation and calm. The composition too is ordered. However, irrational shifts in the scale of the various figures suggest an unusual loss of control. Huge figures on the horizon and in the foreground, and diminutive groups in the middle ground, suggest that size is being dictated not by any formal principles of pictorial composition, but by the varying emotional significance of specific figures or events in Darger's psychic economy.

THE FOUR collage-drawings illustrating the massacre at Calmanrinia cannot be accurately dated, nor is it possible to adequately characterize their relationship to each other. It is possible that Darger may have been compelled to turn again and again, at long intervals, to depicting scenes which possessed particularly powerful emotional intensity.

However, in the case of the four drawings we have been examining, a number of elements which occur in all of the compositions seem to imply a close proximity in time. This is particularly true of the landscape background which is consistent in all four: a featureless yellow-beige ground terminating at the horizon as an undulating ridge which deepens gradually in tone to black. The clouds in a yellow sky are shaded on the lower side to suggest the onset of evening. Larger clouds are tinted pinkish brown as though picking up the light of the sun. It is a landscape designed to reflect the mood of the bloody events unfolding within it. For these reasons, despite variations in the color and scale of the various figures, as well as marvelous irrationality in the structuring of space, I believe the four compositions were executed at one time, perhaps as a set of illustrations for the one massacre.⁹⁸ Darger provides no indication as to how the pictures might be arranged, and the relationship to the text is not so close as to enable us to propose a sequence. What is clear is that the massacre at Calmanrinia possessed enormous importance to Darger's inner world, requiring not one but four, and probably more, representations. That he later returned to the pictures to add further details, intensifying the monstrous character of an already terrifying event, suggests the hold these images had on his imagination even after their completion. That these additions were particularly bloody, indeed gruesome, involving assaults on the interior of the body, suggests the direction in which he was moving.

Henry Darger
 Untitled [Massacre
 scene with strangu-
 lation]. Collage-
 drawing. Watercolor,
 pencil, carbon on
 paper. 19 x 24 in.
 Collection of Sam
 and Betsey Farber,
 New York. ©1998
 Kiyoko Lerner.



Necrophilia and Assaults on the Interior of the Body

She was, like the others, naked. Her skin was a bluish white, tinged with the blackened remains of blood and spotted and streaked by the dark, damp earth. Her skull, chest, and abdomen had been punctured and shredded dozens of times by a sharp, single-bladed knife. The killer had, at some point in his evident frenzy, ripped open her chest and slashed away at her heart and lungs. The remains of her heart lay in the right side of her chest cavity, and the remains of a lung had been pushed to where her heart should have been. The killer had struck repeatedly around her sexual organs, chopping away at the girl's perineum. More startling, he had completely excised her lower bowel and her uterus ... The eyeballs themselves were gone, ... but he could see striations in the eye sockets. And with that he knew, beyond doubt, that he was looking at the work of a serial killer.

—Robert Cullen, *The Killer Department*⁹⁹

Unquestionably, the most frightening aspect of Glandelinian attacks on children in *The Realms* is their obsessional involvement with the interior of the body. In almost all cases, once a child has been killed, usually by strangulation, the body is opened with a sword or knife and the internal organs removed. Not infrequently, living children are eviscerated. When such scenes are illustrated in the collage-drawings, the entire front face of the body is often depicted as cut away, revealing very precise anatomical detail. There is occasionally even evidence of systematic dissection, for example the cutting away of the ribs to provide access to the internal organs. In the written accounts things happen with greater spontaneity and violence. In scenes of massacre, involving hundreds, even thousands of children, this involvement with the interior of the body usually represents the culmination of rapidly increasing frenzy, with excitement reaching murderous intensity as bodies are ripped open from neck to groin, and their interiors exposed, even explored. In that these final operations are most commonly focused on the corpses of dead children this bizarre form of sexual obsession represents an aspect of necrophilia, and the most pronounced indication of massive psychopathology in Darger.¹⁰⁰ Along with the obsessional preoccupation with strangulation, this still more violent form of sadistic assault can be seen as a substitute for sexual intercourse, and the ultimate goal of his fantasy attacks on little girls. In attempting to obtain insight into this infrequently encountered perversion as it manifests itself in Darger, we are obliged to move out beyond the norms of psychological explanation and experience, into the rarefied mental territory of the serial killer.

Throughout *The Realms* there is a curious preoccupation with rapidly accumulating corpses resulting from death in battle, massacres, or natural catastrophe. As we have seen, Darger was compulsively involved with mathematical calculation, with lists of the dead and mortally wounded, along with total numbers of each, carefully recorded. For a writer of history, he is unusually attentive to the problems involved in disposing of vast masses of bodies, which otherwise litter battlefields, military encampments, and flooded rivers. It is particularly striking that it is Henry Darger who often makes an appearance in *The Realms* to deal with these logistical problems himself. The linking of vast numbers of corpses with descriptions of extreme weather conditions is typical, and probably indicative of Darger's varying emotional responses to death and destruction. Occasionally fire is introduced, with huge funeral pyres erected to dispose of the accumulated bodies. Elsewhere they are towed out to sea, or lowered through holes in the ice. When dealing with lifeless adults, soldiers, or civilian populations, he seems to possess nearly normal responses, describing the situation as gruesome, his emotions as cold. But, on other occasions, his portrayal of the fate of bodies and of graveyards moves beyond rationality; as his excitement mounts his response to the remains of battle takes on an increasingly subjective and irrational cast. It is actually possible to observe a shift occurring within him as the temperature rises.

No respecter of persons, or even places, or things, of the memories most sacred to the living, the terrific artillery fire, plowing with terrible destruction tore dead bodies from their graves, shattered all the trees, tore craters by the hundreds in the ground, and blew the over ground vaults to pieces which mark the last resting place of all that was mortal of those who had gone before.

The sixteen large old graveyards outside of Vivian Wickey near Delights Junction presented heart bleeding pictures of the astounding and ghoulish work of the enemy's powerful shell fire. The graves were literally robbed of their dead, and vaults, built of stone, concrete and granite, and also iron, many of them twenty to thirty feet high, were crushed, crumbled, blown to pieces, and scattered about the cemeteries. Metal caskets, containing the mortal remains of precious ones even little children were torn from their tombs by terrific explosions, and either shattered to pieces or scattered all around. Trees were even encased in mangled flesh and intestines hung from the branches. All organs were seen on the branches of trees.¹⁰¹

References to "intestines" in the text invariably provide clear evidence of the author's mounting excitement, and can readily trigger a massacre. Such a shift invariably involves a move from the bodies of adults to those of children, and from the living to the dead.

IN DARGER'S ACCOUNTS of sadistic attacks on living children the victims are usually restrained, bound to trees or vertical supports, or their arms and legs are tied. This is an indication that he expected his approach to be unwelcome, and resisted. It is probable that he had not the slightest understanding of consensual sexual activity. His only sexual partner is, therefore, a helpless victim, a child; and even that child requires restraint so as to be appropriately passive and unable to resist. In that he often describes their legs tied tightly together, it may be that his ideal victim was a child at least temporarily without a penis. Given the extreme nature of his sadistic drives, culminating in evisceration, it is not surprising that his ideal object is already dead. In his depiction of children who have been gutted, it is unusual, though not unknown, for the corpse to possess a penis, though castration is never mentioned.

Given the extreme frequency with which Glandelinians remove all of the inner organs from the body, it is surprising that no explanation for their behavior is offered. I know of only one instance where the reason for such a radical attack on the body is suggested. It is done to ensure that the individual is dead: "This party examining the bodies of women and children and cutting them open and cleaning their bodies out to make sure they were dead."¹⁰² In a recent interview, Dr. Helen Morrison, a child psychiatrist specializing in the psychology of serial killers, pointed out an unusual characteristic common to this select group: the difficulty they have in determining when, or whether, their victims are dead. Because the distinction between the living and the dead remains vague, they may go on relating to the body, talking or having sexual relations, long after death has occurred.¹⁰³ That

Glandelinians display similar confusion, prolonging their assault on the body well beyond the moment of death, and eviscerating the corpse so as to be quite certain that no life is left in it, is significant. The removal of the heart, on occasion, may also be part of this endeavor. The destruction or removal of other more specific parts of the body (for example the cutting out of the tongue, removal of the eyes, severing of the head or feet, etc.) may have additional implications. The neck and throat are often a focus of destructive attack. "Knives were literally forced down the throats of little girls which were cut open inside."¹⁰⁴ Darger also speaks of "the thrusting of red hot instruments down their throats."¹⁰⁵ In the drawings, children are frequently seen with arms or legs cut or torn off, and the texts refer to the cutting away of fingers and toes. None of these violent approaches to the body is unfamiliar in the annals of serial killings. What we do not encounter in Darger is any reference to invasion, destruction, or removal of the sexual organs, whatever their nature. Castration is never mentioned, and nothing is ever inserted into the lower orifices of the body. Sexual penetration has been replaced by cutting, an artificial opening is created in place of the unfamiliar female genitals. Obviously, the persistence of such bizarrely invasive fantasies into adulthood is indicative of profound psychosexual pathology, and would normally serve as a warning that the individual concerned is to be considered as, potentially, extremely dangerous. To what extent and for how long can such fantasies be controlled?

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Such symbolic forms of sexual intercourse are typical of the serial killer, who commonly achieves orgasm during his repeated thrusting assaults on the body interior with a knife. Problems with sexual potency or erection cease when a knife assumes the role of the penis.¹⁰⁶ However, similar invasive forms of cutting are also encountered in the sexual fantasies of young male children. In the absence of a clear understanding of the nature and function of the female genitals, sexual fantasies surface which involve cutting into the abdomen: evidence of an instinctual impulse to penetrate, functioning well before the discovery of the true character of sexual intercourse. Such inevitably sadistic assaults may, in this context, be fused with an unexpected admixture of tenderness.¹⁰⁷ It is possible that such early childhood sexual fantasies lie at the root of Darger's overwhelming obsession with cutting open the bodies of little girls. The element of tenderness is perhaps represented in an unusual collage-drawing, in which a group of naked slave children appear with the long cut in the abdomen carefully stitched closed (see illustration 3.65). Restored to life, with their penises markedly visible, these former prisoners of the Glandelinians dash across the landscape to freedom.¹⁰⁸

THE VIVIAN girls do not seem to have been present at the massacre at Calmanrinia. To correct this omission, Darger invents the dream of Jennie Vivian.

She dreamed that she was witnessing again the frightful massacre of Calmanrinia. In her dream she saw the bodies of children opened while alive, and saw their blood dripping corpses flung on the sidewalks. In the dream the streets were red seas of blood that ran from the mangled bodies in streams, which she dreamed she and

her sisters were forced to drink. She then dreamed that she and her sisters were really among them, really dead, their own bodies also having been opened. She dreamed that the intestines lay like ropes over her body, and that they were besmeared with the blood of other children. She dreamed that she alone had not died, nor been senseless, though her body was also open. She dreamed that she was struck with horror when she saw the heaps of bleeding bodies and also of her sisters which were slashed open. She dreamed that her sisters before they had been killed had fell on their knees and begged the Glandelinians not to kill them in such a cruel way. They were crying bitterly but she dreamed she saw the Glandelinians drag them along the blood covered walk of the street though they screamed themselves to hoarseness. She saw them struggle and heard their pitious screams. Indeed to picture the dream was impossible. She dreamed that they were strangled and then cut to pieces and opened alive and flung on top of the other dead bodies. She dreamed of herself being cut open alive, and then awoke with a start and a sensation of indescribable horror which made her ringing wet with sweat.¹⁰⁹

Darger's overwhelming preoccupation with disemboweling and with the murderous ripping open of the abdomen may, because of its intensity as well as the endless repetition of this kind of assault, require a more personal, earlier, and non-sexual explanation. There had to be a precipitating cause for such an uncommon drive, and for such unusual fantasy content. This is particularly

so when we realize that, most frequently, it is the body of a little girl that is attacked in this way. I believe the explanation is to be found in Henry's early childhood, as a response to his mother's death in childbirth or shortly after. At almost four years of age he would certainly have been aware, during their final months together, that his mother's abdomen was swollen. Even if he was not told at the time what this swelling portended, it seems probable that, in retrospect, he would have connected this swelling with the presence of a baby inside of his mother's body, a baby whose emergence caused her death.

Confronted with the extreme violence of his later fantasies of disembowelment, and the bloody remains of that process in his drawings, highly trained clinicians have speculated that he might actually have been present at the birth of his sister. For a child of four, the experience of terrifying sounds and sights, particularly of blood connected with his mother, would unquestionably have been traumatic and could have been productive of later psychosexual disturbance.¹¹⁰ However, his participation in this event, which most probably did occur at home, seems unlikely. In turn-of-the-century Chicago, even under the most primitive living conditions, children were almost invariably lodged with another family member or with a neighbor during childbirth.

What is certain, whether he was present at the birth of his sister or not, is that he learned of the death of his mother shortly after that birth, along with the disappearance of the baby sister, who he says he never saw. He was told that his mother had died, and that his sister had been given up for adoption. We know with certainty that early in his life he felt intense hostility toward little girls. It would seem possible that in attempting to arrive at an understanding of these two obviously connected events, the four-year-old boy created powerful imaginative images of the new child tearing its way out of his mother's abdomen, literally ripping her apart, perhaps even exploding outward in its struggle to emerge. Lacking any knowledge of an opening, what other explanation could there be?¹¹¹ His intense hatred of little girls, later thoroughly repressed and replaced by its opposite, becomes understandable if he, in fact, came to hold this missing child responsible for his mother's death. And what more appropriate revenge than the Glandelinian assault on the interior of the body, the fantasy of a savage cutting open and ransacking of all that could be found therein? Any possibility of a baby concealed, like a time bomb, within the abdominal cavity is thereby eliminated, and the murderous little girl is repaid in kind.¹¹² Despite the contradictions involved, this early material in no way precludes his later, and no less intense, love of little girls, and his lifelong longing for, and identification with, the lost sister he had never seen.

DARGER's references to the drinking of blood in the dream of Jennie Vivian introduces another bizarre aspect of life among the Glandelinians, forced cannibalism. While the Glandelinians do not themselves consume portions of their victims, they commonly require the children to swallow body parts or to drink blood. Darger also imagines situations where blood is accidentally consumed. Even the Vivian girls were not able to avoid these gruesome and disgusting gustatory experiments.

The boy was then carried before Jennie and the Glandelinians made her plunge the knife into his body. She was helpless and the man was holding the dagger with his own hands. "The boy's abdomen was gashed open, and taking out the heart the cruel Glandelinian with a cruel laugh threw it in my face, and then slicing it up forced it bit by bit down my throat nearly choking me ... These Glandelinians were human cannibals ... Oh how I looked toward heaven begging God to let me vomit up the fragments of the hearts. The rest of the poor little boys were strangled and fairly hewn to pieces before our very eyes, their bodies being torn open and their very insides pulled out. They forced sliced fragments down the throats of my sisters who were fairly strangled almost to death. But God overheard our prayers and we vomited to the anger of the Glandelinians who saw us ... I swooned.

"I believe something or somebody hindered the others from slashing with their knives for we were not killed. I also believe the blood of dead children ran in streams for the whole floor had been covered with blood. I recovered sometime

afterward, and to my horror felt the blood of dead bodies on top of me dripping into my mouth. I having unconsciously drank the blood." Angeline shuddered and a look of horror overspread her fair face. "Some of the intestines were lying across my face and my blood was besmeared with the blood of dead children lying on top of me ..." ¹¹³

At times one wonders if Darger is not trying to sicken himself, pushing things to such monstrous extremes in order to shock himself into self-restraint, utilizing natural disgust as a mode of defense. While such maneuvers might actually work for a time, the danger is that fantasies originally developed to terrorize the ego into submission can easily become part of pathological drives. Serial killers quickly become acclimatized to ever more extreme fantasies and activities, including the ingestion of body parts and blood.

The major knife wound was a gaping one from chest to umbilicus; portions of the intestines had been left protruding from it, and several internal organs had been taken out of the body cavity and cut. Some body parts were missing ... There was also evidence that some of the woman's blood had been collected in a yogurt container and drunk. ¹¹⁴

On the Fantasies of the Serial Killer

Murder offers the promise of vast relief.

It is never unsexual.

—Norman Mailer¹¹⁵

While it is perfectly possible to dismiss Darger's more barbarous fantasy inventions as a playful, even childlike, dabbling with the horrific, no more serious than the rest of the adventures of the Vivian girls (and there is a strong and understandable tendency in some people to do so), this is clearly not the position taken here.¹¹⁶ Although set in *The Realms of the Unreal*, their psychic reality is undeniable, the fairy-tale context merely a mask concealing a deeply troubled and troubling inner world. These are, unmistakably, the fantasy-constructs of a borderline personality, poised on the edge of violent and irrational sadistic and murderous activity. Whether or not they were acted upon, these are the ongoing fantasies of a serial killer. For every individual who suddenly breaks loose, setting off a succession of serial killings, there are many more who manage somehow, throughout a lifetime, to contain their fantasies, suppressing the impulse to move into action in the world outside their minds.¹¹⁷

Robert K. Ressler, founder and director of the FBI Criminal Personality Research Project, who has interviewed several dozen of the more famous serial killers, describes the role of fantasy in these profoundly disturbed individuals.

These men were motivated to murder by their fantasies ... "The fantasies were too strong. They were going on for too long, and were too elaborate." After the murders actually began, the fantasies continued ... All the murderers that we interviewed had compelling fantasies; they murdered to make

*happen in the real world what they had seen over and over again in their minds since childhood and adolescence ... the murderers retreated into sexually violent fantasies, where they could, in effect, control their world ... Sexual maladjustment is at the heart of all the fantasies, and the fantasies drive the murders.*¹¹⁸

It is all but impossible to predict when or whether such an individual will move from fantasy into action. Such killings never occur without years of unseen "preparation." Speaking of the murderer Richard Trenton Chase, Ressler illustrates an important general rule.

*To become as crazy as the man who ripped up the body of ... is not something that happens overnight. It takes eight to ten years to develop the depth of psychosis that would surface in this apparently senseless killing.*¹¹⁹

Nor is it necessary that the individual show any sign of extreme social maladjustment or criminal activity prior to the initial explosion of catastrophic violence. Characterizing what he terms the "disorganized" or psychotic serial killer, Ressler writes:

*Disorganized offenders tend to withdraw from society almost completely, to become loners ... the disorganized offender is alone, possibly a recluse ... Very often we find that the disorganized offender has led a life decidedly free of antisocial behavior prior to his crimes. Such offenders are not criminally oriented, not hostile or particularly violent prior to the time that they erupt into murder.*¹²⁰

If Darger did not lose control and act on his murderous impulses (and I do not believe he did), this extraordinary accomplishment, extending across a lifetime, demands explanation.¹²¹

"Catch Me Before I Kill More": The Contribution of Reality

Serial murderers have become relatively commonplace only in recent decades. The further back in time we go the fewer cases of truly irrational serial killers we encounter, and the greater the sense of shock and outrage unleashed by their discovery and the description of their crimes.¹²² For this reason, it is of special importance to discover a celebrated early example of such a killer active in Chicago, a case which would certainly have been known to Darger in all its sensational detail. The series of violent murders committed by William Heirens, a seventeen-year-old student at the University of Chicago, was discussed in endless detail in all of the Chicago newspapers, and particularly in the *Chicago Tribune*, which Darger read regularly. *Time* magazine referred to the Heirens case as "the crime story of the century," and it achieved national attention.¹²³ It is, therefore, strangely significant that Darger never referred to it.¹²⁴ It is possible, however, that it may have influenced his art in important ways.

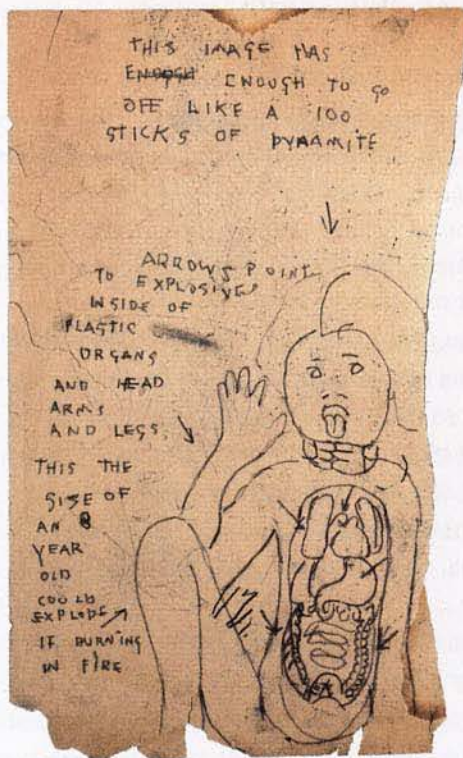
Heirens's short career as a serial killer began with the murders, several months apart, of two adult women. At the scene of the second murder he wrote a message in lipstick on a mirror: "For heaven's sake, catch me before I kill more. I cannot control myself." The case would only have assumed special importance for Darger in January of 1946, when the body of six-year-old Suzanne Degnan was found strangled and dismembered, the parts scattered in sewers throughout the Chicago area. "All of Chicago was aghast at this grisly murder ... what kind of person would kill and cut up a little girl?"¹²⁵

11.19

Henry Darger

This image has enough to go off like a 100 sticks of dynamite. Traced drawing. 12 x 6 3/4 in.

Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



11.20

Henry Darger

Untitled [From coloring book image of seated child]. Traced drawing in blue carbon. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



The obvious parallels between the actions of a teenage boy living in Chicago, and those of the Glandelinians active in *The Realms of the Unreal*, cannot have escaped Darger's keen intellect. Our concern, however, is with the possible impact of the macabre case as it unfolded in the press on his emotions and drives. Would this sudden outbreak of monstrous violence in the real world not have provoked an acute response in Darger's inner world?

By 1946, the writing of *The Realms* and even of *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House* was complete. Darger had embarked on the huge task of illustrating *The Realms*, with 1946 a crucially important year because it was then that he began to use photographic processes of enlargement to produce larger and clearer images. If there was a significant impact on his art attributable to the Heirens murders we would have to look for it in the graphic images he was creating as illustrations of *The Realms*. Because of problems involved in dating individual collage-drawings it is difficult to identify specific developments in the drawings which might point to the influence of events occurring in the outside world. But it is at least possible that the extreme intensification of violence, with scenes of dismemberment, disemboweling, and crucifixion, etc., suddenly added to relatively tame depictions of massacres, may have been provoked by heinous events occurring in the real world around him. The fact that such bizarre and savage events could be written about in detail in the newspapers would have justified to some extent the inclusion of similar events in the collage-drawings. It is not impossible that the still more violent images, which we are about to examine, could have been engendered by excitement unleashed in Darger in response to the murder and dismemberment of a real little girl.

There is, of course, an element of replay in this admittedly speculative theory. The beginning of the writing of *The Realms* was to some extent initiated by the murder of yet another little girl in Chicago in 1911. As we have seen, the impact of the murder of Elsie Paroubek on Darger's creative process can be firmly demonstrated (chapter 9). It is, of course, of considerable interest to witness the contribution of historical events, and other elements coming from outside, to Darger's internal processes. Could it be that it was such outside events which, on occasion, served as a trigger, releasing explosions of violence at least in fantasy, and provoking the more extreme developments in *The Realms* and in his art?

It is known that in later years Darger's room contained newspaper accounts of recent child murders tacked up on the wall. Shortly after his death Colleen Fitzgibbon, a student at the Chicago Art Institute, visited the room to film its contents. In an interview which I conducted with her, she described seeing "newspaper clippings on the walls of children who had been killed."¹²⁶

ONE IMPORTANT example of the way in which material originating in the outside world provoked dramatic changes around this time in Darger's psychological state and in his imagery was his discovery and utilization of human anatomical diagrams and illustrations. Drawings of the interior of the body, even in diagrammatic form, would have excited him to an abnormal degree, possibly provoking wild outbursts of fantasy of the kind we have been examining. While it is not possible to attach a date to his discovery of such illustrations (no anatomy book or magazine article providing a source for them has yet been discovered in his

room), it is absolutely certain that access to such exciting material was partly responsible for the extreme intensification of bizarre violence seen in his more disturbing collage-drawings. It was the availability of detailed anatomical diagrams which now enabled him to depict, with some degree of plausibility, images of opened and partially eviscerated bodies, piles of viscera and inner organs, and monstrous assemblages of rearranged body parts. In most cases he incorporated this borrowed anatomical material by tracing, carefully fitting anatomical diagrams into children's torsos of the correct size, a curious reversal of the process of evisceration.

We are fortunate in possessing a rough sketch which served as a preparatory model for depictions of a child's body opened and with its interior fully visible. Both the original source for the drawing of the child, and the altered image, still exist (11.19 and 11.20). In this instance, we are actually able to see Darger at work on one of his more extreme images, adding strangling hands to the neck, changing the facial expression to accord with the sensation of being strangled, and incorporating a small but accurate anatomical diagram into the opening in the chest and abdomen. The weight and quality of the line suggest the intensity of his excitement.

The drawing was, in this case, not intended as a depiction of a living child. It belongs to the strange world of "Glandelinian art." It was intended to represent a seated "statue" of an eight-year-old girl, a child victim of Glandelinian mutilation. In the inscription on the drawing, Darger indicates that powerful explosives have been inserted into the head, arms, and legs, as well as inside of

"plastic organs," explosives which "could explode if burning in a fire." The interior of the body, lungs, heart, stomach, large and small intestines, and bladder, are carefully depicted, with arrows indicating the position of explosives. Surely this explosive potential provides an exact reflection of the level of explosive excitement engendered in Darger by these images of the interior of the body, opened and on display. "This image has enough to go off like a hundred sticks of dynamite."¹²⁷ It is evident that he responded to internal anatomy with at least the same level of excitement inspired in normal men by the sight of the female genitalia.

Could there be a connection between the vivid newspaper accounts of Heirens's murder of six-year-old Suzanne Degnan in early 1946, Darger's discovery of anatomical diagrams which he could incorporate by tracing, and the sudden increase in violence evident in the collage-drawings produced around that time? Is it possible that most of the more extreme drawings depicting pathological levels of sadistic violence, dismemberment, evisceration, etc., may belong to a relatively short period of time, during which Darger had been stimulated by outside events to unaccustomed intensities of sexual and aggressive excitement? It isn't possible to answer these questions with certainty. But in attempting to understand more of the process involved, we now turn our attention to what is without doubt the most violent of all Darger's drawings.

The Theater of Cruelty: The Massacre at Norma Catherine

The theater cannot become itself again — that is, it cannot constitute a means of true illusion — until it provides the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his fantasies, his utopian sense of life and of things, even his cannibalism, pour out on a level that is not counterfeit and illusory but internal.

—Antonin Artaud¹²⁸

I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughter-houses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion.

—Francis Bacon¹²⁹

Throughout this chapter a valiant effort has been made to maintain the distinction between fantasy and reality, while acknowledging the tenuous, even precarious, balance which so easily allows the one to flow into the other. Fantasy too is real, in that it reflects, with absolute exactitude, a state of being and forces active within the mind. Works of art occupy a curious no-man's-land between the mind and the world, more concrete than fantasy because they can be seen, even shared. But in making the complex and little understood transition from inner darkness to the full light of day, the newly emergent object inevitably confronts us not only with aesthetic questions, but with issues having to do with morality. Since much of human fantasy is sexual and/or aggressive in

content, its uncensored externalization in graphic or written form can provoke controversy, including frustrating attempts to distinguish between art and pornography. The dividing line, if there really is one, is by no means easily drawn. Aesthetic and sexual responses are never clearly distinguishable, indeed there is in all aesthetic emotion a considerable admixture of sensuality, even eroticism.

What, however, if the content of the fantasy embodied in images or writing, passes out beyond the norms of either sexuality or art? Can truly monstrous desires, perverse daydreams, murderous acts embodied in images, find acceptance as works of art, or must censorship intervene at some point to protect us from ourselves?¹³⁰ If it is, as I believe, the task of art to portray the reality of mankind as in a mirror, is there any aspect of our humanness which cannot, or should not, be reflected therein?¹³¹ While these questions might be raised in connection with much of the written and graphic material we have examined in this chapter, they absolutely cannot be avoided in our confrontation with the most powerful of Darger's representations of human evil, the magnificent, but truly terrifying, collage-drawing *The Massacre of Norma Catherine* (11. 21).¹³²

In this work, perhaps his masterpiece, Darger pushed the confrontation with Glandelinian violence beyond anything he had previously risked, in an image so terrible and so original as to overwhelm our capacity for objective aesthetic response. In this picture, intended only for his own eyes and those of God, he exhibited the reality of human evil, if not in himself, then in the Glandelinians. How fortunate to have a distinct group of beings on whom to project all evil. Conceived less as a work

of art than as an embodiment of desire, this monument to human perversion was also intended by the Glandelinians, and by Darger, as a challenge, a gauntlet hurled in the face of God. For the Glandelinians it was, like all of their monstrous deeds, an attempt to provoke a despised deity. For Darger it was, in part, a desperate and terrible question addressed to a passive and silent God in whom, despite the intensity of his sadistic desires and murderous rage, he had, agonizingly, never ceased to believe.

THE THREE PANELS which comprise this work represent a true triptych, an altarpiece in which the two outer wings, filled with activity, culminate in a central panel that is more truly static icon than image.¹³³ In the panel on the right side, *At Jennie Richee, via Norma Catherine*, a truly formidable massacre is in progress. This is Darger's finest depiction of a massacre, shot like a photograph at the height of frenzied activity. In an additional inscription he tells us, *Vivian princesses are forced to witness frightful murder massacre of children*. Then, to explain their absence, he notes, *Vivian girls are not shown in this composition*. Clearly, they, like us, are looking on uninvited — at a slight aesthetic remove — at the bloodbath unfolding in a snowy wood. Other witnesses, so necessary to sadistic pleasure, little girls in summer frocks or underpants, are tied to the range of gray and leafless trees which extend across the background.

Since Darger does not seem to have anticipated our presence, who are the explanatory inscriptions intended for? Is it possible to externalize fantasy with no audience, even a fantasy audience, in mind? In his terrible aloneness, locked up with his desires, the transfer of terrifying images from

within his mind onto paper perhaps held out some possibility of sharing, if only in fantasy — though sadistic and murderous impulses are never really shared, except briefly, with the victim. Nevertheless, in carrying out this transition of internal images into the world Darger became involved in the necessity of making numerous aesthetic decisions. While aesthetic factors in the construction of purely internal mental fantasies are rarely if ever exposed to critical evaluation, it is doubtful that they would conform very closely to the principles and choices involved in picture-making.¹³⁴ It is striking to see Darger making use of the term "composition." Over time, he had come to possess a rare ability to retain his impressive technical and compositional skills in the midst of chaos. This puzzling mixture of passion and control is reflected in yet another inscription. *The children who are naked are made to suffer from the cold*. Then, crossing out the word *cold*, he added: *the worst torture under fierce tropical heat imaginable*. This in a snow scene in the dead of winter!

Despite the presence of thirty-two figures, he has created a truly clear and impressively ordered composition, with the more violent activity confined to the middle distance. It is in this area, in front of the trees and bound witnesses and in deep snow, that the massacre is taking place. The picture is unique among Darger's massacres in showing a variety of very specific and extreme acts of torture and of murder. At left, two men are engaged in slicing open the abdomen of a child. Nailed to a curious right-angled "cross" she may or may not be dead. The Glandelinians have invented bizarre wooden structures on which to impale their small victims, attaching their bodies in strange and unnatural positions with nails through hands and

feet. The children's enforced passivity contrasts significantly with the violent physical exertion of their torturers, whose wild activity in these scenes is suggestive of terrifying brutality rather than systematized sadism. The children are being smashed or torn to pieces with medieval weapons of destruction. To right of center, two officers in mortarboards are disemboweling a living child with such violence and speed that they, their weapons, and the whole surrounding area, are splattered with her blood. Seldom has the ferocious intensity of murderous rage been so successfully embodied in art.

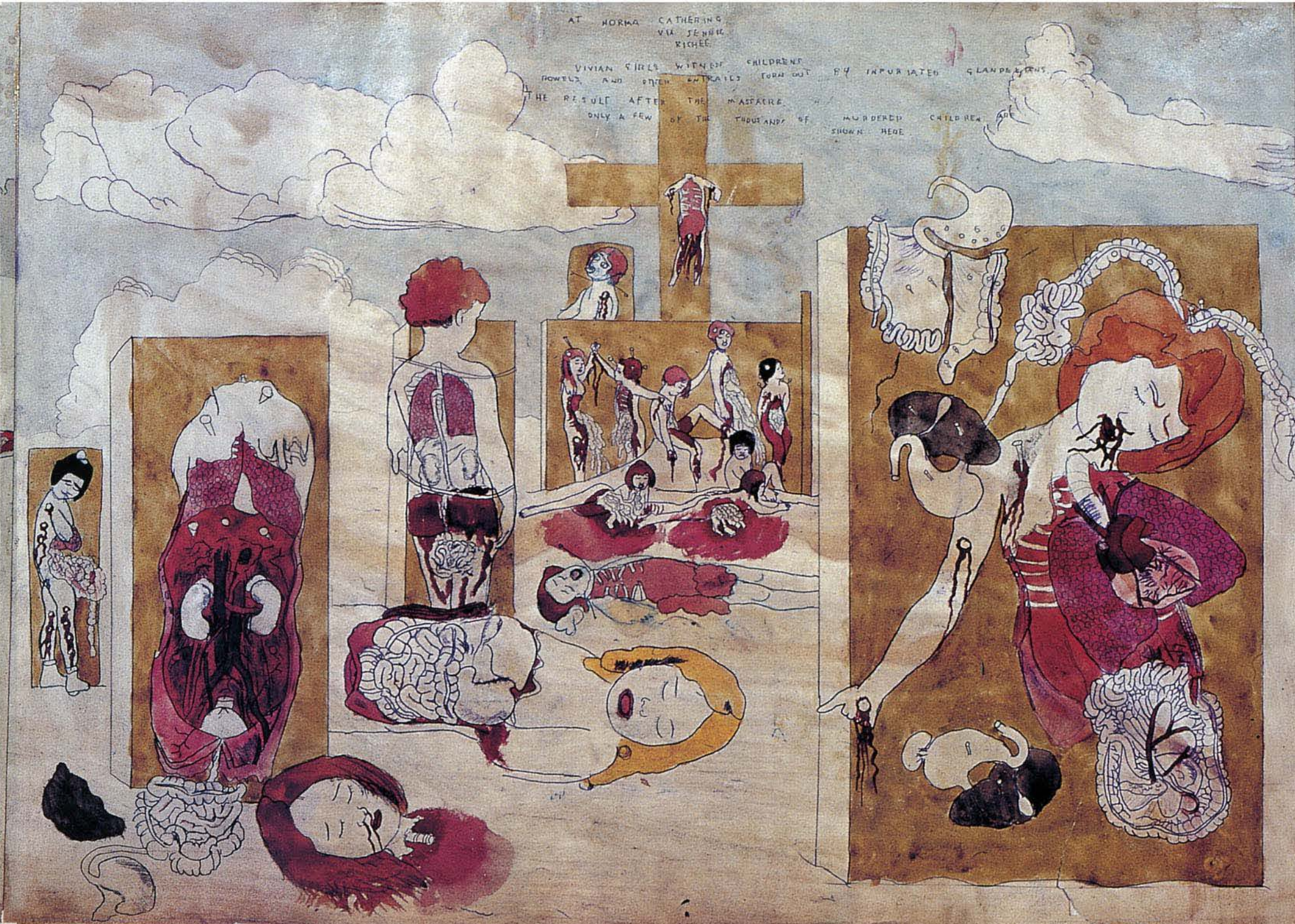
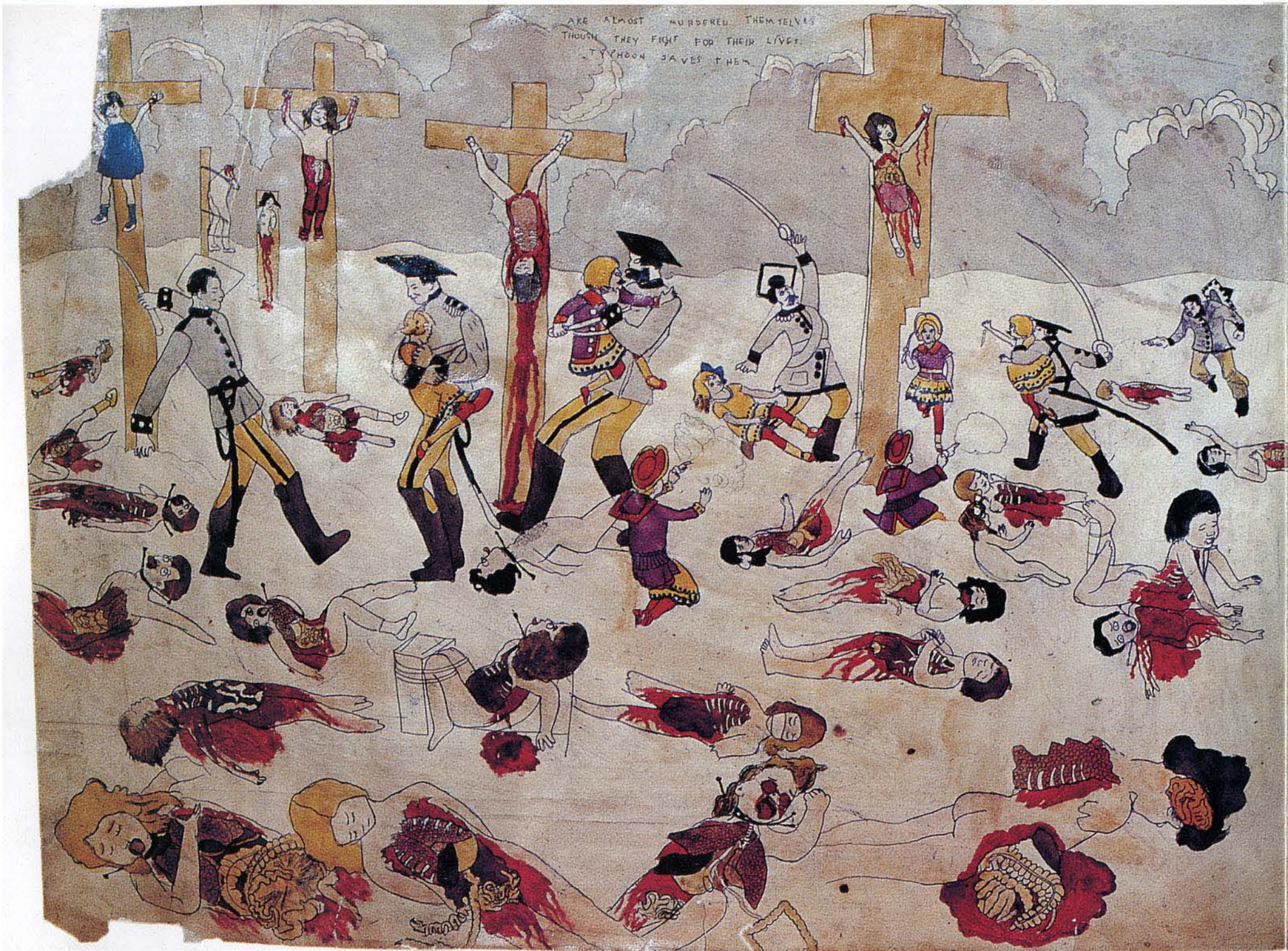
In dramatic, and obviously calculated contrast to these scenes of uncontrolled emotion and frenzied physical violence are the large figures occupying the left foreground. Two Glandelinian officers, one of whom is just bringing a cigarette to his lips, are engaged in quiet conversation. Only the fact that one of them supports the naked body of a dead child under his arm, her tongue protruding, blood trickling from her eyes and nostrils, suggests their participation in the massacre, and their calm, utterly nonchalant indifference to death. For whom was this masterful depiction of inhuman sang-froid intended?

For whose eyes were the mutilated remains, at right, so carefully laid out in the snow? Each one of these corpses is a meticulous depiction of astonishingly complete dismemberment and mutilation, each one evidence of a ferocious attack on the body of a child. One little girl is little more than an empty blue dress attached to a head. A sword protrudes from what would have been her chest. In the other bodies, arms and legs have been torn off, leaving bloody stumps. The bodies have been opened, their contents ripped out and spread over the snow. Only the sleeping heads of the little girls remind us that these bizarre and bloody still-life arrangements were once children.¹³⁵

THE PANEL on the left side of the triptych is in some respects a continuation of the scene depicted in the first panel; in narrative terms it is its sequel. They share a common horizon and the vast emptiness of snow stretching off into the distance. The forest, however, is gone, replaced by a group of wooden crosses of more standard Christian type. The crosses are silhouetted against a darkening sky in which heavy gray clouds betoken the arrival of an otherwise invisible storm. The nature of this unexpected change in the weather, and its function in the story, is explained in an inscription. *Are almost murdered themselves, though they fight for their lives. Typhoon saves them.* Clearly, the Vivian girls, in full uniform, have arrived, as usual in scenes of massacre, too late. They are in some danger, but they are armed and putting up a good fight. One of the Glandelinians has been shot. His sword falls from his hand and his precious burden, one of the Vivian sisters, is dropped. Other tall soldiers in elegant uniforms and high boots grapple with the valiant little girls in Darger's version of a game of cowboys and Indians. This drama really

has only one purpose, a contrast between the dynamism of the hyper-active Vivian sisters, and the sea of naked and mutilated corpses of little girls distributed like flotsam over the ground. The massacre is over, the only evidence of the violence of the Glandelinians the twenty-nine bodies lying silent in the snow, each one an unspoken cry addressed to a heedless God. Each body tells its story, each introduces a new perspective on horror and tragedy. In all of art there is no instance of such detailed and explicit depiction of the mutilation and murder of children. Bodies are shown in every stage of dissection and dismemberment, small anatomical studies in the phenomenology of mass murder. Details never described by Darger in his writings now appear for the first time: the skull opened to reveal the brain within, gaping holes where eyes once were, a body opened from the back and the lungs pulled out. In the distance, a headless body tied to a plank; and lying in the blood-soaked snow two gutted children glued together like deformed and improbable Siamese twins. All of Darger's ingenuity has been expended in selecting an endless variety of strange poses, and in reworking the bodies to depict them opened and eviscerated. Anatomical diagrams designed to show each stage in the process of systematic dissection have been fitted with remarkable skill into these small bodies, or decoratively arranged half in, half out, cascading down between the legs or over the ground. Other bodies lie peacefully on their backs as if sleeping, their chests and abdominal cavities mere gaping containers, their contents gone. All of the children are dead. But for the struggles of the Vivian girls, and the firing of their pistols, there would be no sound.

11.21 overleaf
Henry Darger
They are almost murdered themselves though they fight for their lives. Typhoon saves them [at left]; At Norma Catherine via Jennie Richee. Vivian girls witness childrens bowels and other entrails torn out by infuriated Glan-delinians. The result after the massacre. Only a few of the murdered children are shown here [at center]; Vivian girl princesses are forced to witness frightful massacre of children-Vivian girls not shown in this composition. At Jennie Richee-via Norma. The children who are naked are made to suffer from the worst torture under fierce tropical heat imaginable [at right]. Three-panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, carbon on paper. 22 x 89 in. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



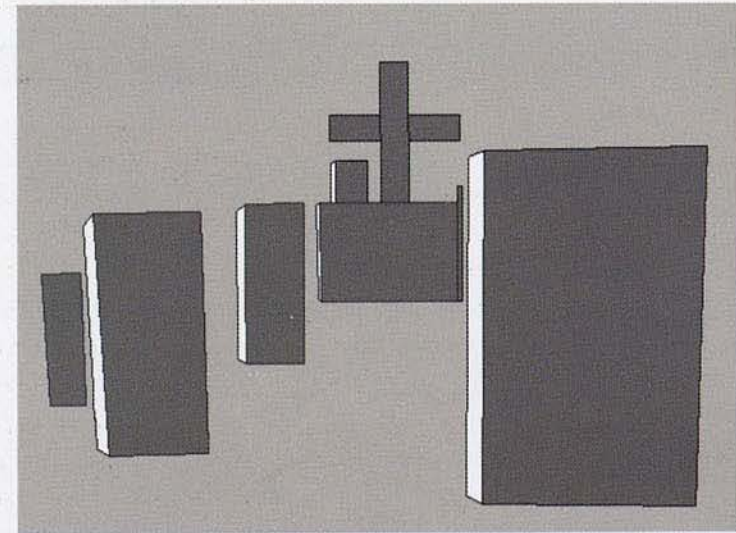
Rising above the scene, and silhouetted against the darkening sky, are four crosses, each with its small burden, the mutilated body of a little girl. Clearly, Darger and the Glandelinians know their theology and the iconography of the crucifixion.¹³⁶ But their intention is ridicule; thus the addition of an extra cross supporting a little girl in a blue frock, blue socks, and little white shoes. On the central cross, on which a Christ would hang, the body of another child is shown, empty, upside down, legs spread wide to the sky, and her blood flowing down the cross and soaking the snow beneath. The Glandelinians, through such perverse crucifixions, offer a knowing challenge to God, ridiculing the sacrifice of His son and the Catholic faith, and turning Golgotha into a charnel house of the bloody bodies of freshly killed children.

And Darger? Everywhere is evidence of careful craftsmanship: the incongruous elaboration of the Vivian girls' uniforms, refined stripes, borders, hair ribbons and polka dots. But it is also evident that for Henry deep crimson paint is blood. He has applied the blood with great care as the final touch, allowing it to flow over the limbs, to pool beneath the bodies, or to trickle in little rivulets around curved forms. A controlled and masterful performance with the brush, gore handled with refinement. In the process of arriving at these horrific forms, Darger actually recapitulates the monstrous activities of the hated Glandelinians, step by step. He first removes perfect little girls from fashion illustrations, comic books, etc. — happy, relaxed, idealized children. He systematically removes their clothing, and then arranges their naked bodies on the ground or on the cross in strangely decorative orientations. He redraws the facial expression to suggest agony, a scream,

or death. He must then cut away the limbs revealing bloody stumps, gouge out the eyes, open the body cavities, and carefully distribute the internal organs. Finally, he follows the trail of blood trickling over the forms or spreading softly outward in the snow. The creative process exactly parallels, or symbolically reenacts, the rituals of murder, mutilation, and dismemberment. In what sense is this sublimation?

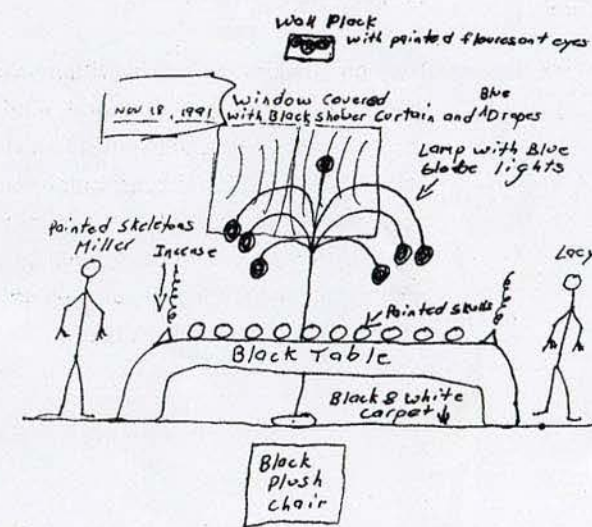
WHILE THE OUTER wings of the great triptych are clearly narrative illustrations, small stage sets depicting sequential incidents in the massacre, and sharing a common landscape setting and horizon line, the central panel seems to belong to a different order of reality. Frozen in time, utterly fixed, silent, and motionless, it is a true icon: a hieratic, stylized, and bizarre object of worship, the central panel of an altarpiece. To go beyond this, to attempt to characterize it more precisely, is exceedingly difficult, for nothing quite like it exists in all of art. In order to deal with its complexity, it is necessary to set aside temporarily all that it might have meant to Darger, and to consider its meaning and function to the Glandelinians. In certain respects it belongs to the unique realm of "Glandelinian art," or in this case, "Glandelinian architecture."¹³⁷

Glandelinian massacres often seem less than spontaneous, since they frequently involve the previous erection of large wooden structures set vertically into the ground. These irregular frame-works serve to support the bodies of children. Usually these posts or slabs to which children are tied, or from which they are hung are randomly arranged. But here, for the first time, the huge slabs, or partial walls seem organized as though



11.22

Diagrammatic representation of picture space of the central panel of *At Norma Catherine, Via Jennie Richee, Vivian girls witness children's bowels and other entrails torn out by infuriated Glandelinians*. Diagram by Kerry K. Ko.



11.23

Jeffrey Dahmer Drawing of the "Shrine," produced for psychiatrists before his trial.

they were intended to define an architectonic outdoor space. The six individual slabs of different sizes are firmly oriented parallel to the picture plane, and set at controlled distances, so as to suggest a powerful recession back, step by step, into space (11.22). In form, they seem to be intended to reflect the design of the choir and apse of a church. This is particularly evident when we observe the huge Christian cross rising high above the rear wall. One might almost view these solid slabs as constituting the ruins of a small chapel, now open to the sky. But since there is no feeling of age, we are more likely to be dealing with a brand-new Glandelinian construction, a demonic outdoor *temenos* designed for the celebration of dark rites, or a false chapel intended to ridicule Christian notions of the sacred. Open to the sky, it invites the Christian God to witness the parody of the sacrifice of the Mass enacted therein. Like de Sade, the Glandelinians delight in contrived acts of sacrilege.

The only "decoration" of this ritual space is a unique form of organic sculptural relief. Mutilated bodies and body parts serve the Glandelinian artist as a macabre medium for his sculptural endeavors. Of necessity, this is a refrigerated museum of anatomy. This "church," decorated by a madman with the bodies of the child victims of the massacre, is a monument to murder.

In the inscription we are informed that this is *The result after the massacre*. It is far more than that. The field of bodies in the left panel represents the chaotic result of the massacre. But here, the Glandelinians have gone to considerable trouble to erect and order a monument appropriate to a great event in their history. Magnificently organized, this carefully designed and highly artificial work of art represents the Glandelinian aesthetic at its most sublime, a horrible beauty almost impossible to comprehend or to tolerate. It is only the aesthetic "distance," the elegance of the arrangement, the subtlety of the pose and balance, the slow and majestic rhythms that allow us to deny the reality of what we are seeing: human bodies, children's bodies, cut up, rearranged, and carefully composed in a gruesome *nature morte*. This macabre museum of horrors, artfully composed, is calculated to shock, to terrify, even to sicken the normal mind: necrophilia embodied in art.

Such monstrous altars are not entirely unknown. On occasion, serial killers, having passed beyond all possibility of return to the world of normal men, have designed private altars, ritual spaces dedicated to the celebration of their dark deeds, and to a kind of *participation mystique* in the spirits of their victims. Jeffrey Dahmer, for example, planned a small but elaborate shrine, which included skeletons, painted skulls, and still-life assemblages of disordered and fragmentary body parts, before which he sought to make contact with his victims (11.23).¹³⁸

ON EACH of the six slabs there is a unique composition. While it is evident in some of these "still-lives" that Darger has allowed his anatomy book to dictate aspects of his composition, this is anatomical illustration overtaken by strange rhythms and surreal body language. On slab two, a torso lacking a head and all extremities is transformed into an eviscerated but haunting slab of meat. Darger has traced a diagram of the deeper lying organs within the body with considerable care. It is intriguing to see his scientific imagination at work engaged in a fantasy dissection, a strange mixture of madness and rationality. Though he may not have understood all of its implications, it remains an unusual achievement for an individual sometimes accused of lacking even the most rudimentary knowledge of the body's external structure. Is it possible to know nothing of the external female genitals, while having accurate knowledge of the circulatory system, the kidneys, and the large and small intestines? The stomach and intestines are still connected, but now lie below the torso in the snow.¹³⁹ The heart may be entirely missing.

The head lying in the snow, with part of the spinal cord and vertebrae projecting beyond the torn flesh of the neck, is a magnificent study in decapitation, reminiscent of the severed heads painted by Théodore Géricault.¹⁴⁰ The calm and peaceful face, its pallor enhanced by the hair which surrounds it, contrasts with the deep red blood trickling from the nose and spreading outward as a stain on the snow. Such dramatic details reveal the extreme concreteness of Darger's visual fantasy.

The children's bodies are for the most part nailed to the slabs but, breaking with the convention of the crucifixion, they appear in profile or even with their backs to us. It is as if he plays with every possibility, anatomical logic yielding frequently to poetry. The child on slab three, her head, shoulders, and one arm untouched by violence, reminds us of the once perfect beauty of these little girls. The child's back has been cut away, her lungs and kidneys exposed. Her buttocks have been flayed or perhaps removed. This is a bizarrely inventive mode of dissection.

The haunting image displayed on slab four is an unforgettably strange creation, with floating body parts drifting, as in a dream, off into space — a strange failure of bodily coherence and gravity. The pose, so beautiful, indeed surreal; the head heavy in death, tilted to one side, is draped with large intestines masquerading as Blengin horns. The bodily organs seem possessed by a slow submarine rhythm of their own which allows them to float free of gravity, tumbling down, or groping blindly upward toward the light. Individual organs belonging to other bodies are nailed to the slab, decorative accents used to balance this impossible tableau whose substance is suspended meat, a butcher's nightmare.

On the long rear wall of this bloody chapel a frieze of mutilated bodies, some standing, others seated on a snowdrift, serves as a kind of apse. Nailed hand to hand, they rise and fall in a frozen dance of death. Below, a sequence of isolated

figures recline in various positions, overcome by the lassitude of death, their blood, still fresh, staining the snow. There is no straining for effect; this is not melodrama.

The large blonde child down below is a study in simplicity. Her face is strangely peaceful. Only the mouth appears unnatural, wide open as if caught and frozen in a final scream or gasp for air. The upper body is untouched, the shoulders and chest of the child so delicate, so white. But the abdomen has been savagely ripped open, revealing the inside of her body undisturbed, a perfect anatomical display, awaiting its new white covering of softly falling snow.

In the distance, the huge cross rises into the sky. Strangely empty, it is barely occupied by a tiny headless body, once a little girl, now a mere fragment of human form lost on the surface of a cross made for someone else. This improbable crucifixion is best understood as an all but imperceptible Glandelinian joke.¹⁴¹ The pale sky beyond with its fluffy white clouds contains no hint of divine response to all that has happened below. Nature here fails to comment or to respond.

At the core of this great hymn to death is silence: the impenetrable silence and the lack of movement that lies at the very heart of the mystery that is death. Absences are all that we can ever see of death. The moment of death has already come and gone. All that remains in this strange museum of corpses is the bizarre preoccupation with bodies

and parts of bodies as aesthetic arrangement, a disturbing kind of relationship and interaction with the dead, a perverse form of caring and of love. Bizarre sexuality and the passion involved in murder is replaced here by a cooler, more controlled manipulation and worship of the dead body, icy but nonetheless recognizable as necrophilia. I know of nothing in art to equal the defiant aesthetic of this monstrous vision, only in the psychopathology of the serial killer do we encounter such calm, such ordered madness.¹⁴²

IF THE ARCHITECTURE of this monument in the snow is Glandelinian, the triptych itself, with its beautifully organized central panel, is attributable only to Henry Darger, his closest approach to capturing the terror and awe that is the sublime. A graphic masterpiece of the highest quality, this scene of massacre and of crucifixion is the Isenheim Altarpiece of Outsider Art and Darger's finest work. To conceive of an image of such stark originality, and in it to confront human depravity carried to its ultimate depths, is at once an act of unimaginable courage, and evidence of a profound split in the artist's psyche. We may be quite certain that Henry dissociated himself entirely from both the bloodlust and the defiant sacrilege embodied in this work. Like the Vivian girls, he was only a spectator at this terrible event.

Significantly, the seven sisters are not depicted, though they were present it seems as witnesses: *Vivian girls witness children's bowels and other entrails torn out by infuriated Glandelinians*. On the level of consciousness this is Darger's indictment of the astonishing evil of the enemy, an illustration and condemnation of the terrible things done to little girls by cruel and wicked adults. To the extent that he imagined an audience he would have expected their horror and condemnation of the events unfolding in his picture. It seems quite unlikely, however, that he would have anticipated the feelings of outrage that may be inspired in some quarters by this work, the anger, shock, and disgust at the vision he has chosen to represent.¹⁴³ Nor is it likely that he could have had any inkling that the monstrous desires embodied here might have been somewhere present in himself.

To Darger this picture was not intended as sacrilege but as religious art, with an obvious precedent in the Bible, the story of the Massacre of the Innocents. Knowing the extent of the brutality embodied in that parallel event, he reminds us in an inscription that *Only a few of the thousands of murdered children are shown here*. To Henry, these thousands of small victims are celestial children loved by God, holy innocents and martyrs to the Christian cause. He would have seen nothing wrong in depicting their glorious deaths, or their mutilated but sacred remains. Scenes of torture and massacre were justified by his faith and richly illustrated in the lives of the saints. It is only our greater psychological sophistication, and our awareness that he has pushed things beyond any previous conception of

the Massacre of the Innocents, that leads us to question his motives and his allegiance. Unaware of the possibilities of ambivalence, he would have had no such doubts. Knowing little or nothing of art he could not have known how extreme his vision was, or how perversely original. His ambitious and truly monumental composition has, therefore, no precedents and no successors, standing as a unique creation in the history of art.

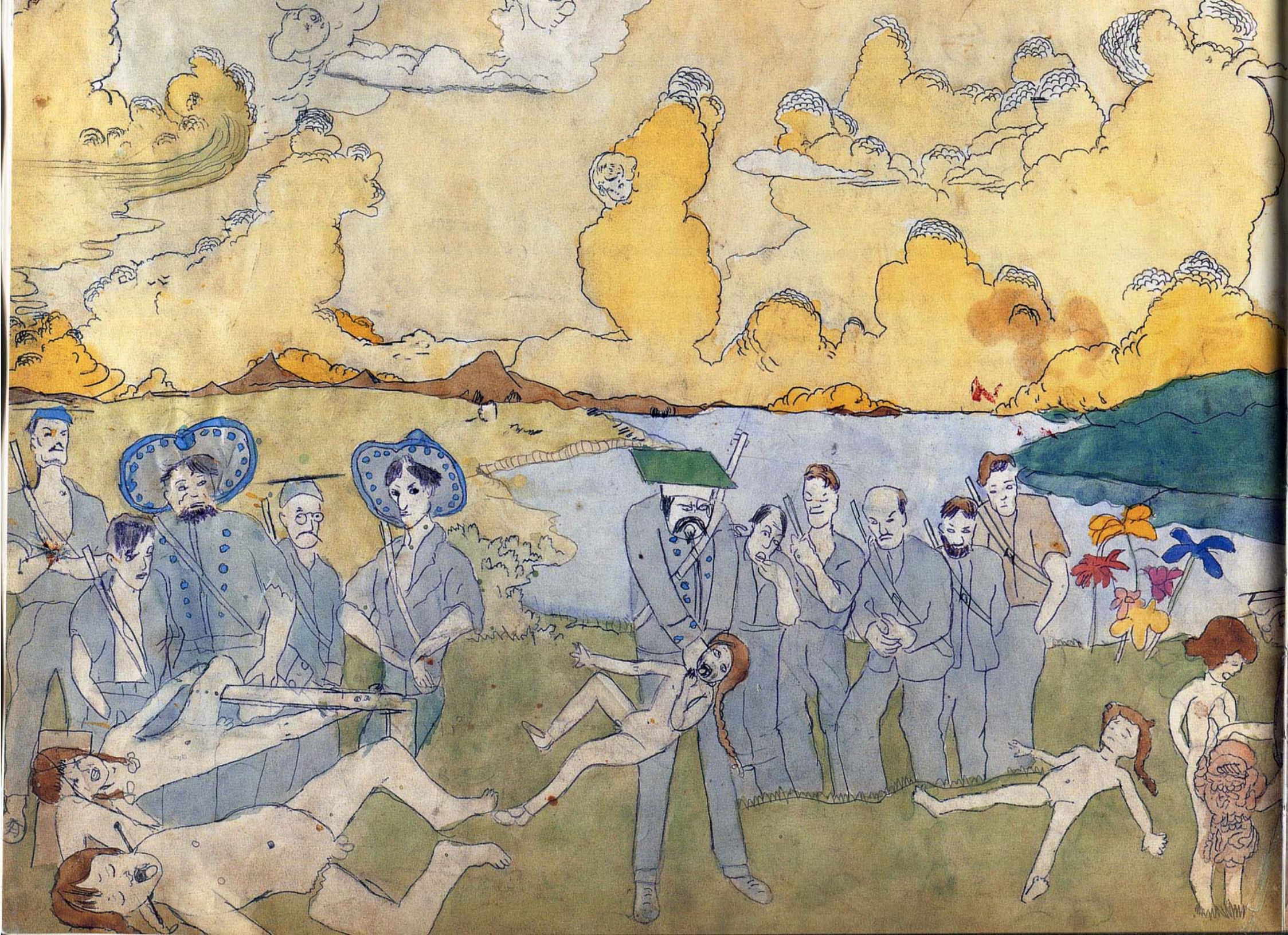
In choosing to illustrate massacres and crucifixions occurring only in *The Realms of the Unreal*, he also moved out beyond accepted Catholic doctrine. In his iconographic originality he hovers on the brink of heresy. This is especially true of his variations on the theme of crucifixion. Throughout *The Realms* Darger depicts a world in chaos, civilization in the process of slipping away, with war, slavery, and moral collapse only part of a larger process of disintegration. He lived somehow on the edge, obsessed with visions of world destruction. Tormented by awareness of the limitless possibilities of human evil, and perhaps his own, he clung like a child to his belief in a God who might appear in the clouds to restore order and to distribute justice. It was the failure of that God, and Henry's confusion at that failure, that, early in his life initiated the exploration of *The Realms*. The massacre at Norma Catherine, and the great triptych in which it is depicted, represents his most radical statement of the problem of evil in his world. Where is God? Why does God allow these things to happen? How far can he be pushed before He will intervene?

As with the atheistic Glandelinians, there was an element of confrontation undeniably present in Darger's attitude to God, the ultimate, perhaps the only, spectator for whom his painting was intended. At times, his questions, his confusion, his anguish, progressed to rage, with the body parts of disemboweled children flung at the sky. He doesn't perhaps formulate his question very clearly, but it is omnipresent in the 15,000 pages of *The Realms*. Why in the face of terrible evil and injustice does God not intervene, if only to help innocent and helpless children? Small matter that, set in *The Realms of the Unreal*, nothing has actually happened, a fact which Darger constantly reminds us of. What he knew, at some level of his being, was that inside the mind, inside the body or the soul, such things did indeed exist. Somewhere inside, he, Henry Darger, was a Glandelinian. What he could not have known was that, somewhere inside, we all are.

11.24 p.608

Henry Darger

Untitled. Collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon on paper. 19 x 24 in. Collection of Sam and Betsey Farber, New York. #307 (recto). ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



11.25 p.609
Henry Darger
*At Angeline Junction
and Strangled.*
Collage-drawing.
Watercolor, pencil,
and carbon on paper.
19 x 24 in. Collection
of Sam and Betsey
Farber, New York.
#307 (verso). ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



12

WRESTLING WITH AN ANGEL: Henry Darger and His God¹

And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day ... And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob ... And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.
—Genesis²

Am an enemy against the Christian cause, and desire with all my heart to see to it that their armies are crushed! I will see to the winning of the war for the Glandelinians. Results of too many unjust trials. Will not bear them under any conditions, even at the risk of losing my soul, or causing the loss of many others, and vengeance will be shown if further trials continues! God is too hard to me. I will not bear it any longer for no one! Let him send me to Hell, I'm my own man.
—Darger³



In a puzzling way Henry Darger's religious beliefs, rooted in Catholic tradition, as well as his intensely personal relations with God, reveal the deep faith both of an innocent child and of a tormented saint. The simple side of Darger's faith finds expression throughout *The Realms* in the pure lives of the Vivian sisters, their moral perfection, their humility, and their unquestioning belief in a just and loving God. It is this innocent faith of children, Darger's ideal, that we will explore first.

The Simple Faith of Children: Catholicism in *The Realms*

Convinced of the basic goodness of all children and of their untroubled closeness to God, Darger remained himself a child, never truly entering the world of adults. The alternate world he created, acknowledging its unreality, is a Christian world embodying his vision of a Catholic utopia; but a utopia strangely troubled by the defiant atheism of a considerable portion of its inhabitants, the Glandelinians and their allies.⁴ The Christian half of the equation consists of territories dominated by the pure ideals of children, chiefly little girls, and of nations obedient to their simple understanding of morality. In this oddly shadowless world, the Catholic faith provides the only truth, with its images and its conception of beauty shaping the environment.

This is particularly evident when we enter the homes of the Vivian girls where Catholic iconography contributes to the decor, just as conventional Catholic morality molds their behavior. A fine example of both influences is to be seen in the collage-drawing *At Angelinia Agatha* (12:1). No innovator when it came to religious architecture, Darger depicts a private chapel whose banal decoration and vapid color scheme may well reflect institutional interiors familiar to him in the Chicago of his childhood.⁵ A simple rectangular room with a wooden floor is lined with wooden paneling and adorned with painted horizontal bands of pink, green, and yellow. Only a certain irrationality in the construction of the interior space disturbs one's sense of the commonplace, with impossibly tiny doors in the rear wall contrasting strangely with the enormous paintings hanging above them. Filled with simple wooden pews, the chapel is empty but for the presence of the seven Vivian sisters, quietly seated and facing front. We are facing the back, so we see the tears running down their faces, suggesting that this is not, for the girls, a typical daily visit to church. The inscription explains: *Jennie in vain offers her sight lost in an accident for the conversion of John Manley her worst enemy. Instead her sight suddenly came back.*⁶ We are present at a miracle. An act of symbolic generosity, dedicated to the conversion of an unbeliever, not only cures Jennie's blindness but moves all of the children to tears. The collage-drawing is itself a work of religious art.

The figures of the little girls (small witnesses to the sacred event) have been traced into the interior, while more powerful representatives of the supernatural world have been introduced at the back of the church using collage. Two conventional

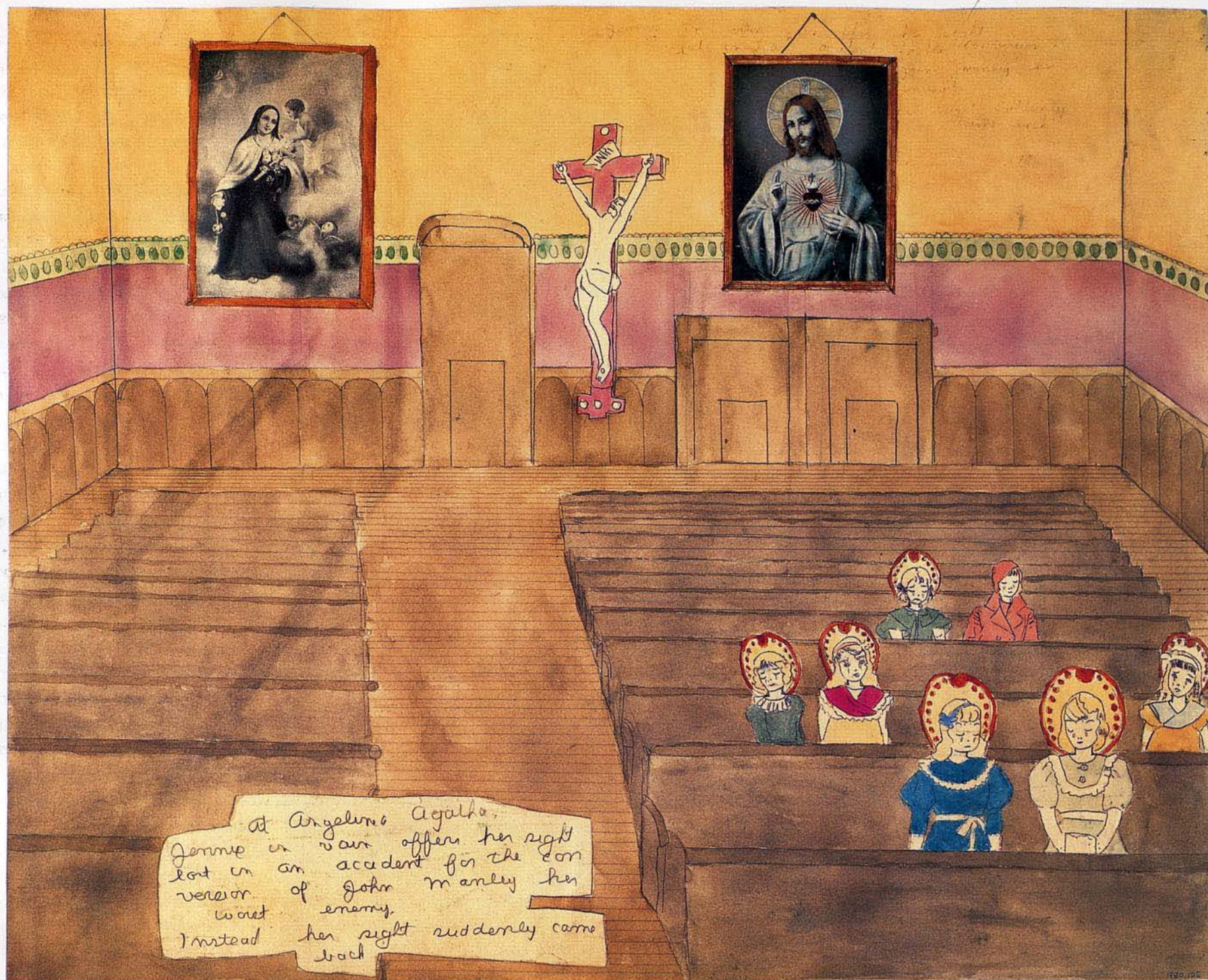
Christian paintings, a Madonna and Child seated among clouds and cherubs, and Christ revealing the Sacred Heart, hang to either side of a smaller crucifix. That Darger felt free to introduce traditional Catholic images into *The Realms of the Unreal* suggests that he intended the Christian faith of his imaginary nations to conform to the version of the Catholic faith familiar to him from his local parish in Chicago. An example of such overlapping of realities is depicted in an encounter between General Viviania and Darger himself. Viviania asks, "Are you a Christian or just serving in my army for revenge?" "I'm a perfect Angelinian and nothing else and have no love for the enemy of my country," answered Darger. "I belong to Saint Anthony Parish."⁷

Darger unintentionally, but regularly, slides into dogmatic innovation, or even outright heresy, as, for example, with the crucifix, the white body of Christ suspended on a pink cross. This piece of religious statuary would seem to have been traced, but it is unusual in depicting the head of Christ falling backward, in death or resignation. The uniqueness of this vision is hardly surprising for Darger who, as we know, is capable of almost endless variations on the theme of crucifixion. The significance of the strange position of the head is poetically explained by a passage from *The Realms*, in which the Vivian girls introduce their teacher to their home with its private chapel.

Violet and Jennie now took their teacher by the hand and showed him all the beauties of the house. Then the little girls led him toward the Chapel. At one side of the chapel's entrance standing up was a tall crucifix, with a beautiful image of our Savior JESUS CHRIST hanging in

Henry Darger

At Angelina Agatha.
Jennie in vain offers her
sight lost in an accident
for the conversion of
John Manley her worst
enemy. Instead her
sight suddenly came
back. Right panel of a
 three-panel collage-
 drawing. Watercolor,
 pencil, and carbon
 tracing on paper.
 48.1 x 178.1 cm. Gift
 of Nathan and Kiyoko
 Lerner. 1980.102R,
 The Art Institute of
 Chicago. All rights
 reserved. ©1998
 Kiyoko Lerner.



12.1

Henry Darger

At Angelina Agatha. Jennie in vain offers her sight lost in an accident for the conversion of John Manley her worst enemy. Instead her sight suddenly came back. Right panel of a three-panel collage-drawing. Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on paper. 48.1 x 178.1 cm. Gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner. 1980.102R, The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

lingering agony upon it. It looked real to him, as he had never saw one like it before, and the beauty of the face was more plainer than he had ever seen it in the pictures. The body looked real, and also the head seemed to sway from side to side in the light breeze, the sad look in his face moving Violet and her sisters to pity. It was a beautiful image of Christ.

To the teacher himself the children looked like celestial beings. In truth as to say everyone who had noticed the little girls, could not keep their eyes away from them, but the teacher himself was awed and believed that they were the children of the celestial country, being more surprised at Violet and Jennie whose beauty far surpassed them all. Turning to Violet he said, "You children almost seem transfigured. I fear you are celestial beings." "We are not though," said Violet. "I know that indeed," said the teacher, "but you look like little angels."⁸

The haunting image of the sculpted head of Christ swaying "from side to side in the light breeze" conforms surprisingly well to Darger's unusual drawing, and the written description of the crucifix suggests just how attentive he was as an artist to varying portrayals of the subject. The teacher's response to the beauty of his small charges, reminds us of Darger's tendency to equate beauty with goodness in children. So lovely are the Vivian girls that the teacher yields to the common opinion that they occupy a curious position somewhere between the heavenly and earthly realms. To some extent this is true of all Christian children in *The Realms*, though, as we shall see, celestial children occupy a special place in the heavenly order. To Darger beautiful little girls were indeed angels.

FOR SOME readers, Darger's heavy-handed morality, and the obsessional preoccupation with the Catholic faith so characteristic of *The Realms*, represents an obstacle standing in the way of a full appreciation of his writings. He was influenced to a certain extent by Catholic inspirational literature. Several books of this kind were included in his library.⁹ Living and working in a Catholic community, he naturally conformed to ideas concerning the moral and uplifting function of literature propagated in less intellectually sophisticated circles of his church. Early on, his ideal audience may have been the nuns who took a vague interest in his writing.¹⁰

The conventional religious element in his written work is restricted largely to occasional passages describing the behavior of ideal Christian children, and more specifically the Vivian princesses. Illustrations featuring traditional religious imagery are also relatively rare among his total pictorial production. On the other hand, Darger constantly departs from conventional Catholic dogma and its imagery, and it is these wildly controversial, indeed heretical, religious conceptions which are far more characteristic and interesting. The traditional Catholicism of *The Realms* should simply be seen as part of the book's historical background, an aspect of the cultural milieu within which Darger lived and worked. All works of art, even the most unconventional and bizarre, reflect the time and place in which they come into being.¹¹ Darger's slightly dated religiosity is but another element in the vast collage of popular imagery that is *In the Realms of the Unreal*. As such it serves as a foil for his explosively subjective and irrational relations with his God, and for his thoughtful portrayal of real issues of good and evil

in the world and in mankind. Given his constant obsession with sadistic violence and warfare, Darger's conventional morality, as opposed to that of the children, is merely a pose, designed to conceal a far more powerful and disturbing reality.

IT IS ALMOST AS IF, writing each day, he required a quota of deaths, an accumulation of bodies to satisfy his rage. In their compulsive involvement with destruction and death, his repetitive writings readily call to mind schizophrenic delusions of the end of the world or, more correctly, the stark and inhuman terrain left after the end. The children, and Christianity, are portrayed against this dark background, and both are troubled and deformed by the violence around them. The idealized moral stance of little girls is contrasted with the reality of adults whose essential concern is with slaughtering one another. Confronted with the monstrous sadism and the murderous rage of the enemy, the children too are drawn into killing as a means of coping. This is Christianity distorted by war, a profoundly idiosyncratic version of Christianity, accounting for Darger's deeply ambivalent vision of God's role in the world. Ethical principles are laid aside in the heat of battle, wholesale slaughter is justified. Yielding to necessity, churches are converted into military headquarters, the ritual of the Mass is replaced by that of massacre, and Christian children are drawn into the planning of war. These bizarre situations and moral compromises are accepted as natural by the reader swept up in the unreality of *The Realms*.



12.2

Henry Darger

At Jennie Richee. Vivian Girls are sent by general (Emperor) Vivian their father to seize a certain enemy plan. Vivian Girls in yellow hair. One is mending a flag but has disguised the color of her hair. Left panel of a three-panel composition. ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.

The illustrations, still more convincingly, render the paradoxical facts of Darger's other world with matter-of-fact simplicity and occasional sangfroid. In the collage-drawing *At Jennie Richee. Vivian Girls are sent by General (Emperor) Vivian their father to seize a certain enemy plan*, he takes care to emphasize that the scene is set in a Catholic environment, a converted chapel occupied by Christian inhabitants (12.2). Color is used symbolically to identify the uniforms of adults and children as those of Christian participants in the war. On the other hand, the military and political implications of the subject contrast oddly with the pink walls and devotional images.

At a table in the center of the room sit three officers, one of whom is identified as Robert Vivian by his blond hair. Gathered around the table are six of the seven Vivian sisters, one of whom is about to receive a scroll detailing their espionage assignment. The seventh sister (a small version of Betsy Ross adapted from a coloring book) is sewing a flag. The large crowd of children, and the presence of the Vivian girls, emphasizes the extent to which the adults in the story depend on children as a crucial aspect of their military strategy.

Largely unfamiliar with the masterpieces of Christian art, Darger incorporates banal commercial devotional images provided by his church and by local Catholic funeral homes.¹² In tracing these sacred pictures his concern was less with art than with suggesting the deep devotion of the Angelinian leaders and their children. As an aspect of traditional Catholic architecture the sacred images also serve to suggest to a viewer the reliance of the Christian nations on the active intervention of supernatural agencies in bringing

the war between believers and non-believers to a swift and satisfactory conclusion. That would unquestionably be their function in the thinking of conventional Catholics, including Darger; but, as he makes clear in his text, supernatural intervention in *The Realms* is scarcely perceptible, if it can be said to exist at all. Silent, ineffectual, and studiously ignored by everyone in the room, these religious icons are an anachronism, all but forgotten in this chapel now devoted to the serious pursuit of war. Nevertheless, the solemnity of the images, and in particular the stark simplicity of the painting of the crucifixion, is reflected in the calm demeanor of the twenty little girls distributed about the room. While their seriousness can be seen as a response to the dangerous task required of the Vivian princesses by their father, it may also represent an anticipation of future suffering and sacrifice since, as we will see, this picture is attached to a central panel which depicts twenty-five additional crucifixions — of innocent little girls (see 12.3). Was the contrast between the two scenes calculated, with conventional religious doctrine and iconography confronted in the next panel with Darger's strange and personal vision of the ritual suffering and death of children? Ultimately, I believe, these related paintings were addressed, not to an imaginary audience, but to God.

GIVEN THE TENACITY with which Darger held to some of the more conservative aspects of his religion, it is not surprising to discover the Pope participating in *The Realms*, and resident in the Angelinian Holy City of Gloriannia, "the pride of God as well as the world."¹³ For a time it is uncertain whether the pope referred to is the Catholic Pope in Rome, or another, the "Angelinian Pope," chosen vicar of Christ in another world. The con-

fusion is cleared up in the course of the Vivian girls' audience with the Holy Father. Both Darger and the Vivian sisters appear to hold the pontiff in high regard, and we learn that, at least as far as the Pope's attitude to the children is concerned, the feeling is mutual.

A few hours later they were before the Angelinian Pope who only desired to see them alone. What a grand thing it indeed was to be in the presence of so great a man. Violet and her sisters to be admitted, and permitted to see the Head of the Catholic Church, who had left Rome to come over to consult the Bishops of Jennie-Wren-Town, and when few were seldom allowed even in his Vatican without private duties to perform.

He however was glad to see Violet and her sisters.¹⁴

Having been introduced into the story, the Holy Father appears from time to time, issuing edicts and seeing to the modification of conventional dogma in times of war.¹⁵ An astute theologian, he is also a perceptive analyst of Glandelinian psychology and politics. Faced with their atheistic hatred of the church, its institutions and clergy, as well as with the extraordinary violence of their attacks on Christian children, he issues a decree defending the rights of the religious to protect themselves and their innocent charges. A novel sin is introduced into this papal edict, that of the religious "showing contempt for their country." Darger's conventional piety was often accompanied by a no less conventional patriotism. Aware of the conflicts that can arise between duty to God and duty to country, he sought to reconcile these sometimes incompatible responsibilities, at least as they were encountered in times of war. The

problem, as he envisioned it, was to some extent resolved by the atheism of the enemy. The Christian nations were not merely fighting their enemies, but the enemies of God and of the church. This argument is most effectively presented in the form of a sermon delivered by a Catholic priest, General Wienstien, who Darger assures us "was not a Jew despite his name, but a pure blooded Abbieannian priest."¹⁶

The Vivian Girls: Angel-Possessed Children

Darger's lack of contact with real children allowed him to maintain throughout his adult life a sentimental conception of the moral purity and innocence of little girls and boys. Children in *The Realms* are portrayed, despite occasional lapses, as ideal representatives of Christianity, relatively untouched by sin and uniquely close to God. Possibly originally conceived as an adventure story for children, the book continued to function, on one level, as a didactic moral epic, with the Vivian girl heroines as inspiring examples of Christian piety and moral perfection. As we have seen, this theme is elaborated throughout *The Realms* with monotonous regularity. The exemplary behavior, prudishness, self-sacrifice, and pseudo-modesty of these seven indistinguishable sisters can be irritating, and is sometimes downright insufferable. Their moral superiority is, of course, relieved to some extent by the fact that these perfect little girls are also perfect shots: absolutely deadly when aroused, holding their own against adults and regularly killing with unconcern. Accordingly, like all children, they are at their moral best when asleep.

How lovely Violet and her sisters did look in their sleep. Violet had a crucifix pressed to her heart, and wore her Rosary and Scapulars with two medals. Jennie had a Rosary in her hands, while the others wore all their religious articles ... Violet and her sisters were not afraid to be alone being afraid of only sin, and no doubt their guardian angels were watching over them for they seemed to be more happier every minute. It would have touched a tender hearted person to see their happiness. A bottle of Holy Water stood on small marble stands over the bedsteads, and wet spots on their pillows showed that the happy children had sprinkled them with Holy Water after blessing themselves and saying their prayers before going to bed.¹⁷

Compared with embarrassing regularity "to the blessed Virgin Mary," the Vivian princesses bear a considerable burden of responsibility which, on the rare occasions when they are not involved in warfare, murder, or espionage, they attempt to live up to.

The next morning while the bombardment was still in general, Violet and her sisters had proposed that they have a recitation of their Catechism. In a graceful hop or two Violet and her sisters were joined together and Violet was selected to act as teacher, and so she with her usual smile in her good natured face proceeded to do so.

"Tell me dear Jennie" she began, placing an arm around her, "Who made you, I, your sisters, our uncle, papa, mama, and also Auntie?"

"God made them all," answered Jennie smiling happily at her sisters who were also waiting their turn for the little play they were having probably playing school.

"Who is God, Angeline Dear?"

"God is our Father who is really in Heaven," she answered. "He is a pure spirit. He knows all things, will reward all the good by taking them all to heaven, and will punish those that die in mortal sin by putting them in the bad place to suffer forever."¹⁸

For much of *The Realms* Darger plays with the reader, building an ever greater case for the sanctity of these little girls, elaborating on the mystery of their seemingly supernatural qualities. Strangely, it is generally their physical beauty rather than their behavior which convinces everyone of their more than human perfection. Like flowers, they mirror the kingdom of God.

"Is your right name Violet?"

"Why?"

"I often heard you called Susan."

"That is my nickname," said Violet.

"I so often go after the flowers called Black eyed Susans they are so pretty on a Church Altar. I love all flowers but more so the beautiful Violets and Forget me nots ... I always had the joy of finding huge clusters of the fragrant sweet smelling violets hidden away under the hedges of a Country lane, and using them for to decorate my room or for the Altars which of course brought me to have the real name of Violet, for Violet is a meaning of humility."¹⁹

Toward the end of *The Realms*, probably as a result of the rapidly increasing sensuality, the aura of sanctity which surrounds the Vivian girls grows ever stronger, confusing and frightening strangers who encounter them.

While her sisters and the two boys knelt in the pews, Violet took the flowers into the Sacristy to give them to who ever she would meet. Only the good Sacristan was there however just finishing sweeping up the floor and as Violet entered with the flowers in her hand, and a row of smaller and white ones around her golden head he stood spellbound as if he saw a beautiful apparation. The strange way she wore her hat added to her unusual spiritual like beauty. At first of course he was a little afraid. She had come so noiselessly and too he had glanced around the room only an instant before and had seen nobody there, and now to his surprised eyes she was there as suddenly as if he had seen a spirit.

"I beg your pardon," she said politely "But Mr. Sacristan please don't be so scared of me. I'm princess Violet and I came to bring these flowers for the altar. There is no room for me to put them on as there are too many."

"A-a-a-a-all—right p—p—princess" he faltered, "I'll give them—to the first priest I see." and he with a shaky hand took the offered flowers and left the Sacristy in haste to give them to the first priest he met ...

"A—a—little angel—in the form of a little girl—gave me these for the altar," gasped the man. "I'm sure she was a spirit. I'm almost afraid to go back in there again."

"Oh, tut tut" said the priest as he took the offered flowers. "Come back to the Sacristy with me. You should have thanked her for the kind offering." They both went back to the Sacristy, the Sacristan however with a little trembling, and to the surprise of both there was no one there. Violet never waited for any one to thank her, and she and her sisters did not like praise and would avoid it if they could.

"What did I tell you" said the Sacristan. "She's gone. It was a spirit I'm sure, a spirit from heaven dressed like a little girl."

"Are you sure?" asked the priest doubtfully.

"But a real little girl couldn't be so beautiful as that. I could not hardly stand it to look upon her. And she appeared so suddenly and noiselessly."

The priest knew in his heart that it was one of the Vivian Girls because no other children were as pretty as she or her sisters were. He decided to look in the Church and see for himself and sure enough in one of the pews were seven little girls their heads bowed devotedly in prayer while two boys dressed as princes were in a pew behind them. He knew then it was one of them who had given him the flowers for the altar.

"God bless those dear little princess saints" the priest muttered devotedly. "There's no children in the world like them."²⁰

While the Vivian girls' astonishing beauty is frequently accepted as proof of their celestial natures, it also leads in the later volumes of *The Realms* into obscure spiritual byways characterized by those disturbing mixtures of religion and eroticism known only to saints. Echoing the Song of Solomon, Penrod speaks for Darger:

"How can I compare or overdo seven little celestial girls who are so fair and lovely that the best author groups [gropes] in vain for words to describe their beauty?" responded Penrod also smiling. "In the Abbieannian tongue I cannot to save my life find words to tell you and your sisters how you charm the hearts of every christian person, and delight even the eyes of God Himself whom you love so well, and even the language of the angels and the Saints has not words to express the love I have for you and your sisters. The hair of every one of you little girls is as spun gold, your eyes are purple pools of light into which when I gaze my heart is almost charmed from my body. The skin of you beautiful beautiful little girls is smooth and sweet as the petals of the fairest flower in all the world, and your crimson lips were surely made for kisses from Our Blessed Lord Himself. Fair are your pure beautiful little bodies, oh my lovely sisters, and shapely your white little limbs. When any one of you lie in my arms with your heart beating against my breast, my unworthy breast, and her lips on mine."

"Oh Penrod dear, oh please stop. We're not so worthy as all that." interposed Daisy suddenly but smiling in spite of herself. She and her sisters had nevertheless listened fascinated to Penrod's strange but well meant eulogy spoken in a soft drawling sort of voice, and were not surprised with themselves for having listened so long. The thought flashed through Violet's mind that only a few years previously they would have laughed to scorn such unusual even if beautiful and well deserved compliments and ridiculed the persons who made them.²¹

It is in the later volumes of *The Realms* that Darger puts forward the idea that the Vivian girls are "angel possessed."²² Reassuring the reader about the ultimate fate of his heroines, he explains the implications of this theological innovation.

But to give the reader ease of mind, I would say never worry [about] them, Violet and her sisters seen the end of the war and the glorious effects of the victory, and Heaven knows how long they lived after that. But in this story where people and children are so good, angel possessed children, for angel possessed they were, do not die until they go to heaven alive. They can be killed of course, but do not die naturally. They are in the same condition as people in the Oz land, and angel possessed children stay children until they go to heaven and then are most beautiful children ever imagined.²³

Described as saints, or given celestial status of any kind, the Vivian girls regularly deny that they are different, except for being more beautiful than other children. As one of them puts it, "We haven't been canonized yet."²⁴ But on other occasions, they do claim considerable moral superiority, at the same time displaying their knowledge of traditional Catholic doctrine, by denying any possibility that they are free of original sin. It is clear that Henry too had been studying his catechism.

"But we were never in the State of Grace at the first moment of our existence," said Violet. "But when we received it in Baptism we hung to the Graces and stuck to them when they increased upon us like leeches, and guarded it in our souls by as all Abbieannians do carefully avoiding and detesting anything that might seduce us into committing not only mortal sins but even the smallest sin, and by using the means of grace we have at our disposal, constant prayer and the frequent reception of the Sacraments. But we were never Conceived without sin, though often we really wished we had been. But only that happened to our Dear Blessed Mother. But don't fool yourself James. It could be possible that a person even if Conceived without sin could fall into sin if they didn't make use of the graces they received. Sin is to us like a horrid disease that fills body wounds with dreadful flesh eating wriggling worms. We treasure sanctifying grace in our souls more than a miser would his old useless trashy gold. This is the most precious gift bestowed on us in Baptism, and is meant by God to always remain in our souls. It is the fruit of the

Precious Blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on the Cross." and tears came to her eyes as she mentioned the cross.²⁵

A final affirmation of the celestial status of the Vivian girls, and an acknowledgement of the central role they have been chosen to play in *The Realms*, is contributed by Christ himself, who appears to them in a vision. This is a marvelous example of Darger's ability to capture an overwhelmingly impressive event in the space of a paragraph. Would that he had also chosen to illustrate this spectacular event in a collage-drawing.

It was toward midnight when the little girls seemed to find themselves rising off their beds while all around them roared a terrible crashing sound. To them it seemed as if all the world was blowing to pieces, the horrible shrieks of millions of demons deafened them, while all to them seemed red, a pit of frightful crimson redness. They even fancied that they saw Christ appear before them all dripping in blood, that Glandelinians were slashing him with their sabers, sticking him with their bayonets while he hung on the cross, and that he seemed to look horrified and pointing toward them say, "Those Glandelinians who are murdering the children in Julo Callio and brutalizing them are doing the same to me. Come to my rescue dear ones, please do." Then he disappeared. There came a frightful hellish blackness, a terrible rumbling roar, a mighty prolonged crash, and then they fell from their beds and awoke.²⁶

The other children in *The Realms*, while morally and physically inferior to the Vivian girls, are also unusually well behaved. This is particularly evident to an outsider, a foreigner, for example, like Penrod:

[A]s all boys and girls are so miraculously good and obedient in the Abbieannian countries, they never give trouble to one another or to teachers and parents and other superiors, and Penrod who was foreign never saw anywhere among Calverinian or Abbieannian children even such a thing as the slightest dispute. At first because of this he had been a little afraid of Abbieannian children as they had seemed very unnatural to him ... At first though good he had never been as the Abbieannian children, and yet caught it from them. Of course, if any one of the reader would believe that Abbieannian children don't play all the same games children do over in any other country he'd better not read this any further.²⁷

The children who function in a military capacity as boy and girl scouts in the army, also need special training similar to that which Darger himself received in institutions for children. As he explains,

Other things being equal, the child scouts also need to study Christian Doctrine more than the citizen child is far better equipped for the dangerous business of child scout life than the boy or girl who had outside the army be trained in the secular branches alone.²⁸

Darger seems to have been aware that difficult situations could strengthen a child, experience of war or conflict could make small adults of innocent and helpless children. No doubt he spoke from experience, remembering the hell of institutional life. His heroines have been forged in situations of extreme danger and terrifying abuse. Armed with their knowledge of monstrous human extremes, they stand out from all the other children in the Realms.

Happily indeed there are few little girls in this story or in reality who have been called upon to go through such trials as had often fell the lot of Violet and her sisters, and so many terrible and immeasurable ones since they ever began to understand what trials was. None of the boys and girls of the scout force at their worst experience ever went through horrors of that sort, and in fact never will ...

"I believe they're not trained that way because we did not start right with them," said Angeline. Our Father and Mother certainly started right with us and believe me though they were as good to us as anyone should be we had to toe the mark with the rules. They started with us when we were so small that we did not know much, which is why we know so much now."²⁹

It is possible that Darger is speaking here of his own education and of his own early life at home with his parents. He is undoubtedly right in attributing his "knowledge," his moral strength, and indeed his survival later in life to his brief experience of a stable home and loving parents.

ONLY ONE type of child is deprived of religious education, or even, on occasion, knowledge of God — the child slave. These unhappy victims of war, along with all children in the hands of the Glandelinians, fall away from God and abandon prayer. Innately good and blameless in their misery, the slave children serve essentially as little martyrs for the faith. Only in death do they achieve some sort of spiritual distinction similar to that of the "Holy Innocents" with whom they are often compared.³⁰ After martyrdom some of the more favored and influential child leaders become "celestial children," with the ability to appear to the living as uniquely lovely ghosts. Annie Aronburg is, of course, the most familiar example of such a celestial child functioning, along with other departed small souls, as a messenger moving back and forth between heaven and earth.

[T]hree beautiful little girls in long white robe-like dresses but they had such a supernatural beauty about them, and one of them looked so familiar to Violet and her sisters, that they felt awed. Violet and her sisters felt indeed that the three little girls were celestial beings for one of them resembled Annie Aronburg a good deal. The other two however they never saw before. Violet and her sisters were almost transfixed by this vision and at last the child resembling Annie Aronburg spoke out in words of sweetest music.

"We are celestial beings and we were killed in the child slave rebellion." were the words. "We were sent by God to plead you to force Manley to atone for his wicked massacres of children, and if he does not and continues to persecute even you little girls, anyone of you are to shoot him down dead when the first opportunity comes."³¹

DARGER'S PERSONAL morality, and his actual behavior in the world, was and remained childlike. While he was incapable of much social interaction and was often angry as a result of the way he was treated by others, he was, so far as is known, a good man, hurting no one, and wanting little or nothing from others. The simple moral standards of the Vivian girls are accurate embodiments of Henry's personal understanding of what was right, of how things should be. The moral values he was taught as a child influenced his behavior throughout his life. "Henry kept his innocence. His conscience was the conscience of a child."³² It is essential to be clear on this point: his innocence was that of a child, not that of a fool. Far more than is usually the case Darger suffered doubts about his moral worth. His strict conscience plagued him. He felt incapable of living up to his ideals, perhaps because at some level he was aware of the existence of an inner world overwhelmed by violence. While the precise nature of his desires and drives was carefully excluded from consciousness, he was nevertheless aware of feeling anger, and of being unable to control explosions of rage. This agonizing sense of his failure to be a good Catholic child persisted throughout his life, augmented by his absolute belief in the existence of God.

It is impossible for us, without such innocence, to comprehend, even to imagine, the intensity of Henry's belief, his persistent and unshakable conviction that God as Father was present in the world and in the Realms. This was and remained a fundamental fact of his being, and is perhaps a major stumbling block in our effort to understand him. Certain of the existence of God, he was tormented by His failure to act. This is the paradox that occupies the heart of *The Realms*: the existence and the silence of God.

Atheistic Theology: The Glandelinians and God

In coming to know the Glandelinians we have become aware that they are the enemies, not only of children and of Christians in general, but of God. As defiant atheists they are surprisingly preoccupied with God, with sacrilege their essential means of relating.³³ All of their evil is aimed ultimately at heaven. There is desperation in their defiance; they too suffer from the silence of God. Glandelinian theology and impiety are important to us only because, as with their sadistic and murderous drives, their unique form of atheism represents an essential aspect of Darger's other reality, revealing the dark side of his relationship with his God. Incapable of disbelief, the Glandelinians' struggle, like that of Jacob, is hopeless; they will ultimately be defeated.

"We are God's foe it is true, and we do hate him and all that is his, but that does not make us ignorant, that no matter what we try we cannot get the best of him. No one can conquer God or His intentions, and Manley ought to know it. And I bet

Ten thousand million dollars that the christian dogs will whip us in the whole war. And someday Manley will see it is true too. Christianity is as easy to conquer as it is to overcome God and his angels and crazy Manley ought to be clever enough to know it."³⁴

As is the case with all serious atheists, Johnston Jacken Manley and his sons were raised in the church; their atheism represents a radical break with God, a desperate effort to escape from something within. That invisible something, with its overwhelming hold on the mind and spirit, was also familiar to Darger.

Hard and reprobate as the Godless Glandelinian general John Manley seemed now, there had been a time when he had been rocked on the bosom of a Saintly mother, cradled with an ocean of prayers, and Catholic Hymns, his now seared brow bedewed with the waters of Holy Baptism. In early childhood a fair haired woman had led him to the sound of Church bells to worship and to pray. Four years that beautiful mother had trained her four sons with long unwearied love and patient prayers. Born of a hard tempered Glandelinian on whom the gentle mother and wife had wasted a world of unvalued love, the Manleys had followed in the footsteps of their father, Johnston Jacken Manley. They had become unruly and tyrannical, they despised all good counsel, and would have none of her reproofs and at an early age broke from her to seek their fortunes on the Angelinian seas, and it was at this time that they became exceedingly wicked.³⁵

DARGER'S INTENSE involvement with religion, as well as his personal quarrels with Christianity and its God, make him a uniquely sensitive student of the history of religion in the Realms of the Unreal. He traces the religious origins of all the nations back to a pre-Christian era, a primitive time when they "knew not God." At this early stage in the history of *The Realms*, the Glandelinian nation was still part of a unified realm, ruled by Abbieannia.

When the Abbieannian nation was first discovered, it was found to be a very good nation, righteous in all ways, but that it knew not God. But then the Abbieannians did not worship images of stone, but believed in two great spirits, "the Unknown" and the demon. They were spiteful toward the one, and faithful to the Unknown.³⁶

The split which divided *The Realms* came about because of the increasing atheism of the Glandelinians and their commitment to the practice of child slavery.

Then came the reign of King Santa Anna Procile [of Abbieannia]. Glandelinia at this time was a willful enemy of God, had robbed the weaker nations, to make herself a power, had stolen Calverinia from Angelinia, and erected child slavery of the most horrible kind.³⁷

We are not really provided with an explanation for the Glandelinians' break with Christianity, or for their extreme hostility toward God.³⁸ Darger seems to imply both a regression to pre-Christian beliefs, and a shift to worship of the demon. At the same time they manifest a preoccupation with the worship of idols, though only as a means of defying God. In an early volume of *The Realms*, Darger describes a visit made by the Vivian girls to a Glandelinian idol house and its multi-storied

golden idol.³⁹ Within the idol's hollow interior, they stumble upon a sanctuary of Satan, "where no one but the Glandelinian priests, and the sacred virgins, were permitted to set foot." Later he points out: "wicked as they were the Glandelinians do not believe in any graven thing, but they do the actions with the purpose of insulting God."⁴⁰

Only once, in a dramatic confrontation between the Glandelinians and the Vivian girls, is a partial explanation offered for Glandelinian evil. In the midst of a scene of truly horrendous sadism, Joice Vivian and her sisters suddenly emerge from hiding to confront the Glandelinian torturers.

"I know why you Glandelinians are so cruel to little children. You are doing this as an insult to God and Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us and even you. God has given you many beautiful things when your nation was only young and even freedom from the ancient Angelinians when they oppressed you over the quarrel over the Popes, and this is your reward. If you are intending to kill the poor children, why don't you do it? Because you don't dare." And Joice and her sisters came out of their hiding place and boldly faced the scowling sulking Glandelinians and would have liked to have smote them down where they were, but didn't dare.⁴¹

The Glandelinian reply to the children's astute accusation begins on a theologically sophisticated note, which is loaded with implications in terms of the split in Darger's psyche.

"But Christ had not died on this world." snapped the Glandelinian in a rage. "He died on the world which is our moon. That ain't dying for us."⁴²

This is the only occasion when Darger returns to his initial premise, that *The Realms of the Unreal* is located on another planet. The Glandelinian argument is both brilliant and unanswerable. Having established the absolute otherness of *The Realms*, and having insisted on their unreality, the laws governing God's creation cease to hold; Christ's sacrifice is without meaning in this alternate world. Contained in this scholastic refutation is the very essence of Darger's creative freedom. He too claims the liberty to act as he chooses in an unreal realm of his own invention. With a foothold in another reality in which he functions as creator, he like the Glandelinians is free to confront God on terms of equality; free to give expression to the evil within him, to indulge in sadism and sacrilege, and to judge God as harshly as he feared God would judge him. His ultimate accusation is the same as that put forward by the Glandelinians as the reason for their break with God.

"You can say to all of us as you like, but it will not convince us. It is true that He helped us make these beautiful buildings, which are more than ten times the beauty of the ancient buildings of the Babylonians, and the beautiful gardens. It is also true that he caused nearly all of us to be rich, no need of hard disliked work. But when one of our best cities caught afire, and we asked Him to put it out by sending rain, He did not hear, and our city was consumed. So we have turned our backs on Him, and are his bitterest enemies."⁴³

This is the plaintive cry which echoes from beginning to end of *The Realms*: "He did not hear."

What is clear is that Darger created the Glandelinians, in part, in order to describe their defiant atheism in endless detail: their delight in sacrilege and their murderous assaults on Christians. Their every move is a challenge hurled at the sky. That challenge is unmistakably Darger's own. The split which divides the good from the evil nations in *The Realms* runs straight through Darger himself, with Glandelinian atheism immeasurably complicating his simple faith.

ACCOMPANYING the Glandelinians' preoccupation with sadism and murder is their compulsive involvement with sacrilegious acts. While Darger had little insight into the complex nature of Glandelinian sexuality, he certainly understood their delight in destroying religious institutions, and in committing gross acts of impiety against the sacred images and symbols of the Catholic faith, not excluding the most sacred of all, the Host. There is, nevertheless, a certain innocence about these passages, in which the Glandelinians are portrayed as exhibitionistically "bad." As with so many events Darger describes, there is a curious lack of proportion involved in the lumping together of acts of mere naughtiness, incidents of extreme profanation, and horrendous accounts of mass murder. Religious foundations, churches, convents, and particularly orphanages, are commonly attacked, looted, and burned. Priests and nuns are slaughtered, though seldom with the same quality of sensual excitement or sadistic passion aroused by the murder of little girls.

When he reached the convent he found monstrous crowds of furious Glandelinians and Omarians armed to the teeth, going in and coming out. All the Glandelinians leaving the convent were loaded, or laden with articles of furniture, clocks, pictures, bedding, and other things. A grand sack of the convent was indeed taking place. Not one of the defenders had survived, and he learned that Violet's mother and aunt had been taken prisoner, countless numbers of Glandelinians having taken possession of the convent. All of the lofty mirrors had been smashed to fragments, the costly hangings torn down, the chapel had been completely wrecked, and after they had destroyed the elaborate furniture of the bedrooms, of the porters, nuns, and children, every Glandelinian began to lay their hands on what they fancied, and the convent was already stripped of the greater part of its belongings. With his hands in his pockets, whistling carelessly, general Seigenury wandered from room to room watching and pretending to direct the proceedings. Every room and hall had dead christian soldiers, and children and nuns, and also Glandelinians killed in the obstinate fight, and both sides had lost over ten thousand in the fight in the yards alone.

Many barrels of brandy and wine had been brought up into the chapel, and around there were gathered scores of drunken Glandelinians and Omarians, singing, shouting, dancing, cursing, blaspheming, reviling God, and even working havoc at the altar and scattering the

particles of the Dear Holy Communion all around, and even taking them personally, or committing all kinds of outrages before the Altar of God than not even the very devils would think of daring to do.⁴⁴

Despite Darger's taste for big numbers and for slaughter on a grand scale, the murder of priests and nuns, statistically, never approaches either the deaths of soldiers in battle, or the massacre of children. This has nothing to do with God protecting His own, or with the unusual efficacy of prayer when utilized by the religious. It is rather evidence of Glandelinian preferences, with battles and massacres of children vastly outweighing the murder of clergy and sacrilege as a form of provocative activity. The typical sequence in which the various forms of contempt for the deity find expression is embodied in this brief account of the famous Kindergarten Massacre.

The most frightful and longest massacre of the whole war was the main portion of the Kintergarten reign of terror starting on the eight day of June and reaching its climax on the last of the same month 1913 ... Over eighteen million children alone had been murdered ... In one section 1,000 priests, and two hundred bishops, and sixty six cardinals, 3,366 sisters, and twenty two thousand religious of all sects were cruelly massacred ... Within those two weeks the scene had become like a behemoth charnel hell.⁴⁵

With millions of children eliminated, and a proportionately smaller number of religious massacred, attention could be directed to acts of more symbolic evil: small gestures added, like a signature, to an already completed Glandelinian work of art.

All the tortures that was enacted here was too terrible to relate, and God alone could estimate the millions of vile crimes and Sacrileges committed against him and all sects of his Holy Churches by the Glandelinians, such as insults to images of Christ, the Blessed Mother, and all saints, Holy Pictures, the Blessed Sacrament, and degrading crimes against the Holy Eucharist was the worse of all. Thousands of Glandelinian horses were given Holy Communion just for spoof and insult against God, and priests were at times forced to walk over an image of Our Lord and the Blessed Mother ... The Glandelinians after committing these vile crimes and wholesale massacres, would then receive Holy Communion in mockery, and only eye witnesses could describe in more greater perfection all the sacrileges and insults to God as these Glandelinians committed.⁴⁶

It is evident that these fanatical acts of mockery are intended to attract the attention of God, as if the slaughter of millions of children might have gone unnoticed. The Glandelinians are remarkably inventive in their attempts to attract divine retribution. Darger is no less inventive in finding ways to link murder with sacrilege, massacre with martyrdom. The Vivian girls are often threatened with death in circumstances of monstrous impiety, for example, a Glandelinian attack on a procession in honor of the Virgin Mary.

The Terrible Sacrilege

[T]he statue of our Blessed Mother had been placed in the desired location and several rude altars had been hastily erected. Violet and her sisters waited impatiently for the approach of the hour it was to start ... "You are more than mere children" said Evans grabbing her in his arms. "With your pure hearts, and beauty you little girls imitate the blessed virgin herself." ...

The procession at this time halted at the foot of the statue of the blessed virgin and at once the Vivian girls struck up the pretty May hymn "Bring Flowers of the Rarest." ... It was at this moment that there came a series of frightful crashes, Violet and Jennie were hurled sixty feet by the concussion, and a wall of rolling smoke clouds enshrouded the region for several minutes. The statue of the blessed virgin was blown to bits, over one hundred of the children were frightfully mangled, the priest was killed, the blessed sacrament was picked up in fragments under general Vivian's mangled horse, twenty of the soldiers were killed and over sixty wounded. Violet and Jennie escaped unwounded.⁴⁷

It is clear that to the children these evil deeds of the Glandelinians are both horrific and comprehensible. They also provide an occasion for energetic intervention or, at the very least, stern disapproval. Joice expresses her outrage at sacrilegious acts committed by Phellinia Tamerline, the Glandelinian general responsible for the massacre and dismemberment of millions of children, including her little friend Annie Aronburg.

"If ever I saw that wicked Phellinia Tamerline, I would shoot him down like a raving mad dog." said Joice with her impetuous nature. "I saw him commit an offence which christian though I am I would give anything for revenge. He raided a church before our eyes, destroyed the Sacred Holies, scattered the Holy Eucharist, even feeding several of the particles to swine, and stabbed the images of our Blessed Virgin and also of the Sacred Heart of our dearest Lord."⁴⁸

Other events, combining sacrilege and sexuality, may have been less comprehensible to the children, though not to the Glandelinians, and perhaps Darger.

"I have seen at their wicked commands many times the sacred hosts stolen out of raided Catholic churches mockingly given to horses, pigs, or dogs and cats, and of naked women being forced to sit down before a whole crowd of men or lie down on large crucifixes and be rided around camp as an exhibition."⁴⁹

VARIATIONS on the image of the crucifixion appear early in the history of the Christian church as an act of defiance and ridicule. Darger would have known, for example, of St. Peter the Apostle being crucified head down.⁵⁰ The Glandelinians are uniquely creative in this respect. The naked woman carried on the cross is, however, an unexpected transformation, since the majority of crucifixions portrayed by Darger are those of little girls. An important example is the collage-drawing *At Jennie Richee again escape*, the central image of a three-panel composition (12.3). At first glimpse, this drawing appears to have nothing to do with religion, but in fact it provides a dazzling pictorial embodiment of Darger's controversy with God.

The setting is simple, a gently rolling grassy landscape set beneath a blue sky. A road curves through this pastoral scene, growing wider as it recedes into the distance. Charging toward us is a wild tangle of figures on horseback. The horses dart to right and left, or rear up amidst clouds of dust. In the confused jumble of sixteen horses and riders, it takes a moment to identify the seven Vivian sisters on horseback out in front, desperately seeking to escape from their armed and dangerous foes whose sharp, curved swords flash over their heads. In a truly masterful composition Darger conveys a convincing sensation of chaotic movement, of imminent danger, and of flight in a tightly compressed mass.

12.3
Henry Darger
*At Jennie Richee
again escape.* Central
panel of a three-panel
composition. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.



12.3

Henry Darger

*At Jennie Richee
again escape.* Central
panel of a three-panel
composition. ©1998
Kiyoko Lerner.

The enormity of the precarious situation the Vivian girls are in is made terrifyingly evident by the long row of children's corpses hanging in the air above them like washing on the line. This is undoubtedly the fate which awaits them if they do not escape. It is this assemblage of massacred children which makes this picture unique, for all of them but one have been crucified. Darger's central concern here seems to be with questions raised by the crucifixion of children, indeed of little girls. While several children have been eviscerated, most have had their hearts torn out through a gaping cavity in the chest before being nailed in groups to the "crosses." Many have had arms or legs torn off. All are dead.

Initial responsibility for this horrifying spectacle must be assumed to rest with the Glandelinians who have not only killed these children, but have erected a gruesome collection of structures on which to display their naked and mutilated bodies. At the center stands a makeshift monumental gateway through which all who use this road must pass. By raising it high in the air so that the dead children are silhouetted against the sky, they also offer the spectacle as a monstrous insult and provocation to the Christian God. Despite the agonizing nature of this deeply disturbing subject matter, it is necessary that we pause to consider the religious implications of this multiple crucifixion, for the Glandelinians and for Darger. This is, in a very real sense, an embodiment of his personal religion, and an icon unique in all of Christian art.

Since it is the Glandelinians who have erected this bloody monument, let us begin by examining their procedures and intentions in some detail. At right, a single, huge cross has been raised. It follows the standard cruciform design, but nailed to it are four children, three on the crossbeam and one below. Lacking one or more of their extremities, they have nails piercing various points on their bodies: shoulders, elbows, head, or hands. Not content with this four-figured crucifixion on a single cross, Darger depicts two small additional crosses nailed to the first, and projecting awkwardly out from its vertical post, a knowing reference to the subsidiary crosses of the two thieves. On each of these diagonal crosses hangs another child. Thus a single structure supports six murdered children, their eyes closed in death, their bodies streaming with blood. Having created this inventive variation on the Christian cross, already heretical in its free-form design, Henry, and the Glandelinians of course, proceed to construct a variety of other kinds of structure capable of supporting multiple crucifixions: a carpenter's nightmare of flimsy and irrational woodwork projecting out of the ground and silhouetted against the sky.

The makeshift monumental arch consists of two inverted L-shaped forms which have been nailed haphazardly together. On each of these huge L's seven children have been nailed, an additional hint at a possible fate awaiting the Vivian sisters. The central group of seven appear to have joined hands in a gruesome dance of death; a single nail piercing each set of joined hands. Attached to the crossbeam by the arms stretched above their heads, these naked bodies simply dangle in the breeze. At the end of the projecting beam a little girl hangs by a rope around her neck, the only

child not crucified. On the other L children have been attached in every conceivable way, facing the "cross" with nails piercing their backs, and even nailed in a bizarre seated position to the vertical post. Those children who still have feet are wearing socks and shoes.

Scattered about the landscape are smaller additional structures of various designs, one a perfectly traditional cross. Some children are attached to simple vertical slabs set in the ground. On one of these a little girl has been crucified with her hands behind her back, attached by a nail piercing her navel. Finally, at left of center, a cross of extraordinary design, almost a Chinese character, supports a little child whose body is entangled in three crossbeams and nailed in various places.

One could go on and on with this hideous litany, but what is evident is that the Glandelinians' intention, both in terms of the perverse and absurd variations of the cross, and the extraordinary variety of ways in which the children have been attached to the various crosses, is to expose the Christian image of the crucified Christ to ridicule. By pushing things in so many extreme directions, the original image becomes both nonsensical and tame. And, as we have seen, in the adjoining panel, Darger has represented the crucifixion of Christ in perfectly traditional form (see 12.2). The dramatic contrast was clearly calculated. That Darger intended the comparison is made evident by his description of deaths of children in the occupied city of Julo Callio.

Children unable to work or overcome from Tortures lasting months were cruelly crucified, nailed to crosses by their fingers and toes and hands and feet combined — and stripped of their clothes — even little girls, and scourged with iron spiked lashes as they hung there. Nay, the crucifixion was similar to that of our Lord, and equally horrible, and thorns were crushed upon the heads of the dying children.⁵¹

This is heresy. By crucifying two dozen innocent little girls at once the overwhelming significance of the death of Christ is called into question.

ANYONE FAMILIAR with the writings of the Marquis de Sade will recognize the emphasis on blasphemy and acts of sacrilege and, in particular, the profanation of the Host, as an essential aspect of his anti-Catholic and anti-clerical stance. De Sade too was involved in demonstrative atheism, as well as provocative violence and sexuality. Intended to shock, his defiant gestures often appear no less childish than those of the Glandelinians. Emerging from the same orthodox religious traditions, both de Sade and his Glandelinian imitators seem oddly caught in belief, unable to escape or, convincingly, to deny. In both, one senses an underlying anguish as they fling their acts of defiance in the face of a God whose existence they claim to refute. All of their gestures are calculated to excite God's response. That this is true for the Glandelinians is made evident by a challenge publicly issued by their leader.

Manley on the following day before the advance for Francis Atlanta, held a public speech, but most of the things said during the speech would probably cause God to strike me dead if I wrote it. In the speech he blasphemed God most shockingly and had even challenged him to come down from heaven with all his angels and fight him and his army.⁵²

A child attempting to provoke his father to action is usually successful. Even punishment is preferable to abandonment. The anguish, the terror, experienced by the Glandelinians is that of abandonment. Nothing they do can bridge the void, nothing overcome the terrible silence of God.

The Unanswered Prayers of Children

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

—St. Matthew⁵³

Pervading *The Realms of the Unreal* and troubling Darger's mind and spirit is a group of profoundly disturbing questions having to do with the suffering of children. The great war of *The Realms* is fought over the issue of child slavery. In a real sense, Darger was the first child slave of *The Realms*, the first victim of the Glandelinians. He wrote from experience, experience which could not be extinguished or denied. The statement of one of the Vivian sisters might well have been his own.

[S]he still remembered her frightful experiences in the Glandelinian "child slaughter" pens, and surely did not wish for any more, and she and her sisters did not yet get over it, and often had dreams of those terrible bloody days.⁵⁴

Along with the children, Darger can be observed struggling to understand the cruelty of adults: their irresponsibility, their callousness, their neglect of small children in their care, their violence and their abuse. He might be said to have created the Glandelinians, turning them loose in *The Realms* so that he might study them in an attempt to understand the cause of their hatred, the source of their evil. In the helplessness of the child slaves he could re-experience his own early helplessness, his own confusion as a child.

But Darger's questions, Darger's anguish, reach still further. Taught in childhood to believe in an omnipotent God, he sought to understand the terrible suffering of children in God's world. How could He allow innocent children to be harmed, to become the victims of adults? From his own experience he wrote of God's failure: God's inability or unwillingness to respond to the prayers of Christian children, God's helplessness in the face of evil. Bitterly angry, he allows the Glandelinians to taunt the Christians and their God. Their fury is unmistakably his.

"If the christians hadn't remained faithful to him, we would not treat the children so cruel. But by the name of your God we will do this to all christians and their children, whose nations declare war on us, and plead as they will it will do them no good ... There is no Angelinian that could rescue the snipes, and whose [is] the God who could save the children from us I'd like to know. We have already made thousands of the kids suffer unbearable sorrows, and mothers broken hearted over the loss of their children have prayed to their God for years for the return of their children, but without results. Your God is afraid of us Glandelinians, and we can prove it."⁵⁵

To the child slaves the behavior of the Glandelinian masters is completely incomprehensible, their murderous lust entirely outside of their experience, their hatred of God inexplicable. The monstrous nature of their assaults on children inevitably overwhelm the fragile egos of their child victims, undermining their faith, and massively damaging their personalities and their relation to reality. Darger himself provides evidence of the permanent effect of such traumatic experience on the shaping of a life. But, while he describes in detail the children's response to adult violence, including the madness of Jennie, he looks to another source for the collapse of their faith in God. A little boy slave explains:

"It's no use my poor girl" he broke out at last. "It is of no use this you have been trying to do. You and Jannie both are brave little girls — you both had the right on your side, but it's all in vain, and out of the question for you to struggle. You are in the hands of the devil and his angels — they are the strongest, and you will die here if you do not give up."

[...]

"There is no use calling on the Lord — he never hears us." said the boy most steadily. "I don't even believe there is a God, or even if there is, He has taken sides against us. Don't you see from the way the christians get licked so hard, and they are fighting to free us. All goes against us, heaven and earth. Everything is pushing us slaves into hell. We are in hell now. Why shouldn't we die when we go there?"

Poor Jane closed her eyes, and shuddered at these awful dark atheistic words.

BOTH THE ALTERNATE world of *The Realms*, and the circumscribed reality of Darger's life in the real world, make it evident that he had essentially ceased to attempt to understand the behavior, the motivation, and the feelings of adults. The powerful drives motivating the Glandelinians' behavior are largely unexplored and unexplained in his writings. What he was obsessed by and attempted desperately to understand was God's failure in the face of evil directed at innocent and helpless children. It is this obsession which made a theologian and philosopher of Darger, rather than a psychologist or historian.

It is touching to hear the explanations offered by the more innocent slave children as they make excuses for God. Less tolerable, at least to an unbeliever, are those put forward by the Vivian girls, echoing the standard explanations of the church.

"And He certainly did not, could not, listen to me because he could not hear me or see what was going on."

"Indeed how can you be so sure of that my dear Jannie."

"I made the same prayer every day for many long hours, and the Dear God even never answered it."

"That cannot happen, Jannie, and you must not think it can. Don't you see and understand that the dear God is a most loving Father to us all, whether we be good or bad, and no matter what we think He always knows what is best for us even when we ourselves do not. The loudest battle or all the greatest noise does not stop Him from hearing us even if the whole world was blowing to pieces. Now if we pray to Him for something that is not

good for us, He does not grant it. And if it is good for us he delays a long time to try our faith. Sometimes prayers are not answered also because we do not do our own part to try and gain it. Sometimes we ask Him too much, probably something that is a miracle to grant and that would be foolish.⁵⁶

It is unlikely that any child would be satisfied by platitudes such as these. When we learn the nature of Jannie's unanswered prayer, it becomes possible to glimpse the enormity of what she, or more correctly Darger, is asking of God. Her dissatisfaction with God is precisely the same as Darger's, and nothing appears to have been able to resolve it.

"Listen dear Jannie," she said. "Let me tell you something important. When we all have a sorrow that we feel is quite unbearable, and which it would be of no use for us to tell anyone about or to share with anyone else, we tell it to the Dear God in Heaven, and we always ask Him to help us out, restore to us what we lost, give us what we desire if it is for our good for He can do anything we ask and he can also take away all our sorrows and also the thoughts that makes us sad and forlorn. You know that don't you Jannie Dear? Don't you pray every morning and night and often during the days to the Dear God in Heaven, to the Blessed Mother, and the Saints and Thank God for all your blessings and beg Him to keep you from harm and to answer your petitions?"

"Oh now I don't do that." the child answered. "I don't believe in praying any more. It would never do any good. It is all hoko pocus."

"Do you really believe that dear Jannie. Do you think praying is no good?"

"Not always. I just don't believe in praying because I once did and it brought no results. I used to pray asking God to return Angeline's sisters to her and as they do not come I have forgotten all about it. I don't believe that God hears the prayers that children utter to him, especially when they are slaves."⁵⁷

Jannie's unanswered prayer for the return of Angeline's sisters might seem oddly insignificant. It takes on extraordinary importance, however, when we remember Darger's missing sister, the little girl whose name he did not know. She still existed somewhere. Did Darger go on for the rest of his life praying that she might come back? He never spoke of this. The final sentence of Jannie's speech is of unique importance: "Let's hope that some day some good couple in our own country including myself will have a child like her someday." Darger makes a slip, irrationally referring to a single sister. It is almost as if he has suddenly forgotten who is speaking, allowing himself to emerge from behind his character.

While Darger never spoke of the possibility of finding his lost sister, he did very frequently raise the issue of adopting a little orphan girl. Indeed, as we shall see, one of the central issues in his personal quarrel with God concerned his desire and his inability to adopt a child. That he prayed, hopelessly, for this, we know with certainty.

"And are you still praying every day that all will come out right and that God will give you the joy of seeing the return of her sisters?"

"Oh yes I do. But it does not seem to do any good to pray any longer even though I do not give up. I feel like stopping sometimes because I still fear that praying does no good."

"What did you say? Why on earth are you telling me? Why don't you pray with more faith?"

"It is of no use. The Dear God does not pay any attention to me."⁵⁸

Darger is speaking out of his own experience, his own anguish. The accusations he voices here are his own, the questions he raises about prayer stem from the very core of his existence and his faith. Unable to accept either the solution offered by atheism, or the sanctimonious cant provided by the clergy, he remained suspended in an unresolvable paradox: at once certain of the existence of God and torn by doubt. His faith and his torment echo through *The Realms*.

The Death of Children

Although Darger had experienced the deaths of both of his parents well before the writing of *The Realms* began, one senses a curious gap in his psyche, a failure to believe fully in the reality of death.⁵⁹ Perhaps the character of his mother's final departure, experienced as a disappearance rather than a death, set the stage for this apparent inability to respond.⁶⁰ Until the end of his life his descriptions of death and dying remain essentially those of a child and, as with children, the possibility of his own death did not enter consciousness. This, despite the fact that several Henry Dargers are killed in battle toward the end of *The Realms*. A single piece of evidence exists suggestive of a more deeply felt response to the death of adults close to him, the "Memento for All Souls Day" in which, in April 1913, Henry asked that his father, mother, and Phelan be remembered with prayers.

WE KNOW that children in the Lincoln Asylum died with some regularity, and Henry as a youngster may have had more and closer experience of the death of boys and girls than of adults. In writing of the death of children he often draws on conventional religious beliefs to describe what are invariably tragic events. Occasionally he lapses into heavy sentimentality.⁶¹ The dramatic staging of the death the little hero James Green provides a fine example of Darger's sentimental style at its best.

"For the sake of the cause of your Holy country, even though I'm a foreigner I'm very glad to die." pursued James Green. "Even at first when I prayed to God, I was a little afraid I'd be asking too much, but now since everything is OK, I'm ready to go ..."

Certainly Henry believed in survival after death, at least in the case of Christian children. In *The Realms* he envisioned a special fate for boys and girls killed in battle or martyred by the Glandelinians. As he elaborates on the future of these celestial children, these "other Christs," he departs from established doctrine and moves off into a personal vision of another world. Here too, one senses a certain gap in reality, a denial of the reality of death.

If this story were true, these, also probably among victims of massacre, disasters, and dying child slaves would be Chosen Bands in Heaven, so like the Holy Innocents, First Flowers of Christ's Coming, yet so different, who would be terrible witnesses against all things recorded against the Glandelinians recorded already in these many volumes so far. The child slaves would have been many of the first; the numbers of others have grown into the many millions scores of millions even.

These beautiful bands who either in reality, or in this story, followers [of] the Lamb withersoever He goeth, would have been made up of Dear Children, who might have evidently after death, been changed into other Christs, by early communion, and brought our Blessed Lord's speedy intercession in behalf of Abbieannia and her Holy States, and bring such a downfall of a wicked nation like Glandelinia, that Babylon, Rome, or other wicked countries never experienced, and in a way that would flabbergast the world and astonish all historians, and writers, and all college Professors including, I the author.⁶²

On the edge of heresy, Darger entertains the possibility that God will intervene in the war, entering *The Realms* to punish or reward. In the meantime the children, victims of evil adults, are transformed through death, with the author clearly reveling in the description of their final moments. His account of the death of "little Jane" is but one of many such apotheoses. The repetitions we encounter in this passage may reflect Darger's use of an original source of rather less heretical content.

And there in that lowly tent, with everyone weeping silently, the priest was filled with the sense of invisible presences. It seemed to him not a place of death but of glory. The heaven that hung about this girl scout had in her infancy had reached her again, and of it for a moment all within the tent were partakers. And so the girl scout who had gave her life for the christian cause, having at the bidding of duty, had gave her life that the cause might be won, and had departed out of this sinful world into peace, and into her abode in Holy Sion. She had kept her Baptism as to be without blame, she had observed the commandments of God, and now had met Him together with all the saints of the Heavenly Court, and now has eternal life and will live forever.

There is anyone may know and feel, a chosen band in Heaven so like the Holy Innocents, first Flowers of Christ's coming, yet so different. Jane was one of the first in the holy cause of Abbieannia, their number will soon grow into many thousands. And this beautiful band, which follows not only the country's cause, but

also the Lamb wherever He goes is made up of the dear little brave child scouts, who give their lives that their holy cause may be won.⁶³

THE DEATH SCENES involving evil adults provide a marvelous contrast to the peaceful passing over of innocent children. Summoning the fires of hell, Darger assumes the guise and something of the stature of an Old Testament prophet, wielding the wrath of God in a final confrontation with pure evil.

[A]n overpowering sense of terror came upon him. Did he seek the dangerous looking "parsely" looking forest of his own choice? Why was it so hot, and why was there so much smoke and wind? Those were the questions he could not have answered, and he knew the winds were off the northeast. Indeed he seemed to be fleeing from some pursuing evil in red color. It might have been the fierce northeasterly winds, but there seemed nevertheless to ring in his ear a strange dying groan, there seemed to dance before him the visions of the children he had killed or allowed his men to shoot down, and the wild angry jargon of many strange voices haunted him as though a horde of demons were at his heels. The very sky was dark and threatening as if a tornado was coming, and strange weird shapes, clad in the sable vestre of the dead, seemed to spring up at every step before his startled eyes.

Hour after hour passed away, and still he pushed wildly on, his face quivering with great fear of a coming doom, and with horror. With the first glare of fire, brightening the sky as red as White Hot molten iron, his strength [so] far supported by terror, deserted him, and coming upon a big fir tree he threw himself beneath its shelter, and loosing some of his terror, fell into a deep sleep.⁶⁴

At this point, Darger allows us some respite, as he turns for a brief moment to the gentle death of children, exchanging the lurid colors of hell for the silvery iridescence of paradise and the falling asleep of angels.

Let us dear readers turn from this wicked wretch of a Glandelinian officer to the bedsides of the dead child scouts. Their delicate fragile hands clasped upon their bosoms, and intertwined with the beads they had so loved in life, their faces calm and serene, and telling a tale of full beatitude, immortal they lay in their beds, surrounded by their mourning comrades subdued into unwonted gentleness as they entered the chamber where death had dealt his strokes.

Having established this dazzling contrast he plunges his reader once again into hell.

When the Glandelinian prisoner awoke he found it dark as night, and very hot, and rubbing his eyes, discovered with dismay that he was alone in the trackless forest in the face of an oncoming and fiercest and most dreadful fire hurricane that had ever come under his experience.

The wind was tossing and writhing the trees in mortal agony of sound, and smoke was so thick he could not see before him. Starting to his feet he pushed vigorously ahead. But whether was he going? To remain in the woods in such a tearing fire storm were to perish, the fire would soon come and he would be destroyed ... The flames were coming in a great leaps and rushes, and in waves, booming and roaring as if volcanic furnaces were active, and as the echoes of the horrid voices rang in his memory, he pushed on as though the whole demon world were at his back. Several minutes passed, and finally the wanderer came to a familiar tree. One look, and he perceived it was the very tree he had started from. The wild horrid explosion of curses and blasphemies that burst from his lips fell idle upon the dreadful fire storm, but to his distorted fancy they seemed to be reechoed by a million hideous tongues of the wind; and more afrighted than ever he saw a long wall of sky reaching flames swiftly approaching like the speed of birds on the wing ...

On he went then, swifter; with the desperation of despair, on, on, till thicker smoke closed about him, till the rude wind rose and howled and raged more fearfully after him, and threw itself irresistibly against him, pelting him with flying branches and gravel, till the roar of winds like voices of the night were changed into groans and thundering sounds and dirges, on, on, ...

Again there rang in his ears a wild shout as of demon triumph. Overhead the flames stretched now, and despair forced him once more to open his eyes. Looking straight before him, he saw, could be a line of children clad in white and passing him, one after the other looking down upon his face. His eyes started in terror, the fire came up like a storm wave all over, an expression of the damned came over his features as the flames singed him, and with one more dreadful outcry of frightful pain he was gone.⁶⁵

In this astonishingly beautiful evocation of hell and all its demons, Darger conveys with terrible clarity his vision of the retribution God should impose on the murderers of children. But, while justice is done in this case, there is no suggestion that God has intervened to bring it about. It is nature in the form of a forest fire which exacts a fitting punishment, and behind nature lurks, not God, but Darger. As always, God is curiously passive, uninvolved in his world, unconcerned even by the most monstrous manifestations of human evil.

At another point in *The Realms*, after a truly frightening account of the torture and mutilation of children, the troubling question is raised quietly and without fanfare:

"It is horrible" said Darger. "It is a wonder and even strange to me indeed that God did not hurl a thunderbolt upon those Glandelinians. But yet I know that worse slaughters have been inacted by the Glandelinians."⁶⁶

Concealed in this admission is silent rage and tormenting doubt.

CONTRASTED with divine passivity in the face of evil is the energetic activity of the children themselves in defense of the faith and their God. The intensity of their belief in God, and the strength of their resistance to the evil of adults, are constantly portrayed. Darger borrows from the lives of the saints to construct stories illustrating the courage and the faith of children, both his heroines and, more rarely, the child slaves. A favorite example is the children's determined defense of the Host in situations of terrible danger or sacrilege. Most of these hair-raising rescue operations involve the Vivian girls.

They came to a high rise of ground, and climbing to the top they could only observe a sea of smoke in the distance, and in another direction they saw some commotion going on, and descending cautiously saw several rebels come out of a blazing church, with the Blessed Sacrament in their possession. The priests of the church had been taken prisoners, and Violet and her sisters therefore decided to give themselves up to the enemy at any risk or cost for the sake of saving the Blessed Sacrament. Violet observed that one of the Glandelinians was spitting at one of the Sacred Hosts and therefore gave him a serious wound in the left hip, thus causing some of the other Glandelinians to rush after them. Seeing they were Scoodlers Violet and her sisters realized it would be utterly rash to allow themselves to be captured, but Violet by a trick

managed to secure the Blessed Sacrament from the hands of the dead Glandelinian whom Joice had shot in the heart, and then dashed away.

In the confusion that followed the shots fired by the girls, the priests had escaped, but the Glandelinians enraged over being outwitted in such a fashion, and caused by little girls in ragged clothes at that, gave chase, some firing in constant shots in their efforts to kill the supposed girl beggars.⁶⁷ They also wished to capture the Blessed Sacrament, more than the fugitives, and so spread out in three directions to head them off ...

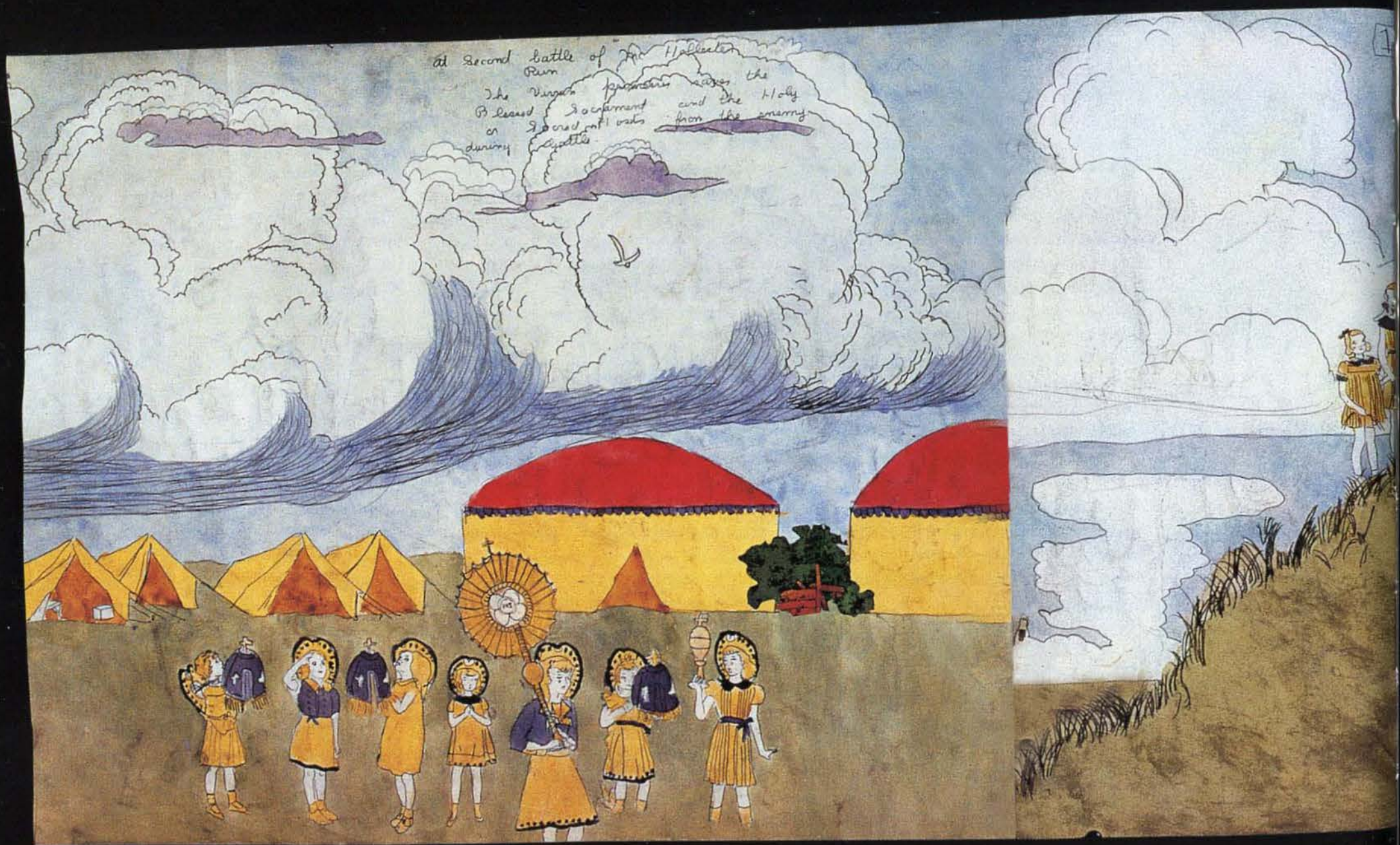
Violet and her sisters seeing the necessity of it, crept behind a ledge of sheltering rocks, and Violet set the Blessed Sacrament down in a safe place. Then all seven of the girls started firing rapidly, bringing the Glandelinians down and wounding them at every shot ...

By crawling on their hands and knees, Violet and her sisters managed to get along the ground without being hit by the terrible storm of bullets, but they were pelted occasionally by branches, and at times a high explosive would burst many hundred yards ahead or to the right, left, or in the rear of them and sent them rolling for several yards from the concussion. Violet and her sisters had however reached the christian lines, and Violet had the Blessed Sacrament still in her possession, and when they could escape out of the zone of terrible firing, they soon found an Angelinian priest and brought it to him.⁶⁸

12.4

Henry Darger

At second battle of
McHollester Run the
Vivian Princesses
save the Blessed
Sacrament and the
Holy or Sacred Hosts
from the enemy
during battle. Left
panel of a three-
panel composition.
©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



A collage-drawing depicts a similar rescue: At second battle of McHollester Run the Vivian Princesses saves the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy or Sacred Hosts from the enemy during battle (12.4). In his illustration Darger has chosen to play down the drama of the event, emphasizing instead the intimate relationship between the Vivian sisters and the sacred symbols they seek to protect. The children are dressed as if for a religious procession in Christian outfits of yellow and purple, their heads covered. Five of them are holding articles designed to be carried in procession, including a covered chalice and (at the center of the composition) a sunburst monstrance used both to protect and to display the Host. The two remaining sisters respond to these sacramental symbols, one by folding her hands in prayer, the other acknowledging the presence of God by standing to attention and saluting. Nothing in the surrounding military encampment implies any hint of danger, but the extremely dark and emphatic shading of the clouds above is suggestive of intense conflict and anxiety. Tears running down the faces of the little girls reveal the extent to which the threat of sacrilege has upset them, even though they and the Host have apparently escaped unharmed.⁶⁹

Other children, more vulnerable than the Vivian girls, are not so fortunate, for example, little Jennie Anges, aged seven.

[H]er thought was not for her own safty but for the safty of the Dear God she loved. So she had immediately hurried to the church and had taken the ciborium from the tabernacle intending to hide the Blessed Sacrament in a place she had previously prepared, for she had known from stories she had heard from eye witnesses that the wicked Glandelinians would commit the first act of profaning and insulting the Sacred Heart Host in a way that would be a mortal sin to relate in writing or explaining in words, an example worse than acts of immodesty to the Holy Eucharist.

The Poor child however was surprised before she had time to conceal her treasure, and with a shriek of horror, she placed it on her breast folded her arms tightly over it, and resolving to die rather than loosen her grasp, shrieked; "Oh please Dear God, have mercy on me and help me save the Blessed Sacrament. Oh please do." So delicately formed she looked like some celestial angels standing before the altar. In fact she was already marked for heaven.

The Glandelinians with wild yells, and cursing and blaspheming and heaping insults upon the child and God and all his saints, rushed at her like raving demons, for they knew why she was there, and what it was she was trying to save. They were determined to rob her of her treasure ... The wretches tugged violently and furiously at her arms, they pulled with all their might, they tore her clothes till she was

completely naked, they showered blows upon her, cursed her, strangled her, pulled out her tongue, hair, and eyelashes, and kicked her in the stomach, and struck her in the face and jaw with their fist, and pulled out her hair, and tortured her most horribly, but those delicate arms did not move. They kicked her in the most delicate part of her legs and body, hit her in the side of her belly with straps, and scourged her right before the altar but in vain. A strength and bravery from on high was given to the delicate child, and during all the excruciating torture, and bleeding from innumerable wounds, and in the desperate struggle she did not yield ...

At last an infuriated ruffian fell her with a blow of the heavy musket butt, and the others completed the work with their bayonets, literally laying her body open. They even tried to rip apart her chest and did so in their efforts to tear it loose, even tore out her heart and entrails and tried to cut the arms asunder ... In death as in life however the faithful child kept her desperate grasp upon the ciborium, nor could all the united efforts of the wild Glandelinians tear it away.⁷⁰

Darger delights in miracles, and so, on occasion, God is allowed a minor part in making such splendid manifestations of faith possible, though always at the expense of a child's life. In this case, the small martyr's body is thrown into the Norma Run River where, failing to sink, it floats downstream, the ciborium safely ensconced in the empty tabernacle of her breast. Some time later, the Vivian girls "came upon a small mound of earth which was engraved on a large tombstone the simple tale":

Here sleeps in the Lord
Little Jennie Anges, aged six.
THE LITTLE GIRL MARTYR
who died in the most terrible tortures
In defense of the
MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT

Violet and her sisters filled with sudden emotion gazed down upon the small grave, with their souls in their eyes. She lay there in the grave so peacefully, sleeping the hallowed sleep of martyrdom. As they stood by the grave, never had poor Violet and her sisters looked so beautiful. Reverently Violet and her sisters, their tears falling fast, knelt down, stooped, and kissed the grave of the martyr-girl. "Anges" they murmured, "Anges" and their tears fell fast.⁷¹

THE MANY OCCASIONS when valiant children come to the defense of God contrast strangely with God's inactivity when children are exposed to comparable situations of danger or defilement. It seems probable that Darger was acutely conscious of the vast discrepancy, and was deliberately stage-managing these contrasting situations and responses as though to bring things to a head, forcing a confrontation, insistently raising the obvious question. Throughout *The Realms* it is the ever recurring violent deaths of little girls which Darger employs in his confrontation with God. It was these crude, essentially meaningless deaths of innocent and helpless children in a world created by God which tormented and enraged him. How could He allow it to happen?

AND YET, on occasion, Darger too can be astonishingly matter-of-fact, even ruthless, in eliminating child characters from his story. Undoubtedly the most shocking such event, shocking because so totally unexpected, is the death of Marcus Schoefield Penrod, one of the most attractive and believable personalities in *The Realms*. No minor figure, Penrod has played a significant part in all fifteen volumes, earning our love and respect as guardian and eventually brother of the Vivian girls, despite his youth. He is also a character in whom Darger has most clearly embodied his own youthful self. Suddenly, in the final volume, Penrod is killed off with extreme haste and little emotion.⁷²

It happened that in the midst of the frightful carnage a horrible tragedy happened ... Penrod rushed out into the thickest of the fray ... he succeeded in obtaining the flag, but when he returned with a stagger, he was seen to fall within the christian lines, and Violet and her sisters seeing that he fell rushed over to him, Violet grasping the flag and handing it to a man who rushed up. The lad was shot in fifteen places and mortally wounded. It was seen that he was sinking fast and almost broken hearted Violet and her sisters wept while some of the boys ran to report the affair to general Evans.

The lad was carried to the rear, and taken care of, and the saddened little girls stayed by him praying and begging God to spare him if he will. Evans at once ran to the scene and knelt by the little boy ... But the lad died in his arms, to the wild grief of Evans, and the soldiers had to lead them away almost by force.⁷³

Surely Penrod will reappear? In fact, he does not. He alone among the principal child heroines and heroes fails to make it to the end of the story.

God as Weatherman

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

—Genesis⁷⁴

Throughout his life Darger grappled with the question of God's role in the making of weather, and the extent of His responsibility for natural disasters. His own early experience of sudden catastrophe had taught him that nature, or God, was unpredictable, potentially destructive, and unconcerned with the needs or wishes of mankind. *The Realms* is haunted by the necessity of assigning blame. Mother Nature is introduced into the story occasionally in an attempt to relieve God of responsibility for fire or flood, earthquake or tornado; but Henry could never really convince himself that natural law could totally replace divine will. Behind every disaster he saw the hand of God.

Study of the "Weather Books," which he maintained daily for at least nine years, reveals the extent of his ambivalence.⁷⁵ Intended to ridicule the presumptions of the weatherman by documenting the extent of his failure, these "proofs" of the unpredictable nature of weather reveal his underlying assumption that God was constantly intervening in the world. Thus God is the only one who can predict the weather.

Despite many attempts to blame the Glandelinians for explosions, fires, and floods,⁷⁶ or to demonstrate the abstract functioning of natural law, or the disruptive effects of war on the environment, Darger's ultimate accusation is directed at heaven, with mankind's sufferings attributed either to divine indifference or retribution.

"Christian defeats, wars disasters, forest fires and floods, massacres of children, and too many Glandelinian armies, I'm so tired of hearing of all these disasters. I guess indeed it seems as if Our Blessed Lord has forgotten about poor Calverinia, and in her condition. I don't think He can make us win this foul war. I'm quitting and going home right tomorrow. That's what I will." Mildred's voice sounded more fretful than usual ...

"My Mildred dear, don't you know it is very wrong if not sinful to speak in that way about our Blessed Lord? Anyway don't you know he is not responsible for this. The enemy is to blame."⁷⁷

Unlike Mildred, Darger was seemingly unable to take his toys and go home. As disaster after disaster overwhelms *The Realms*, with thousands of pages devoted to the description of natural upheaval, we are forced to realize the enormity of Darger's obsession. Torn by doubt he felt driven to confront God with his deeply troubling accusations. At the same time he was scanning the newspapers, assembling further evidence of God's inability or unconcern in the real world. Once again, he raises the issue of His failure to answer prayer, His unresponsiveness to the cries of His own people, not only as individuals but as a community of believers. On occasion Darger's tone

becomes frantic, his words bitter, almost sardonic. The destruction by fire of the city of South Bend provides a fine illustration of God's indifference to human suffering, his apathy in the face of desperate petitions. Writing of this disaster, he grows positively shrill.

Trees on the opposite side of the city were being dynamited too and cut down to make an extra wide and long breach in an effort to save the city if possible ... General Vivian moved further up the hillside to get a better view of the scene, where many of his own soldiers were still working desperately against their own part of the fire line.

And all along the edge of the newly made clearing, the general saw images and crucifixes planted by the Religious People like barbed wire before the trenches in the world war. And he also discerned indistinctly about ten priests singing High Mass with many people attending with the hope that Our Blessed Lord would answer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and keep back the Red Demon ... Not far from where general Vivian stood was a big way side shrine, with large candles ready to be lighted before it, which by tomorrow will be reached by the fire. This was soon it seemed going to be a woeful day for the inhabitants of South Bend, for this large city was soon going to join the rest in this sea of fire ... The whole population of this region was still seen spending the horrible day in prayer and religious procession, ordained by the Bishop and Cardinal of the threatened city. This Arch Bishop's proclamation urged all to pray for the providential miracle.

General Vivian again took a look through his glasses at the threatened city, and saw crowds of those remaining file in and out of the churches within his sight, for special prayers. No doubt a thousand candles burned in offering to Our Blessed Lord and protecting Saints, in all of the churches, while in the Cathedral and outside of it, there was exhibited a Picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a sacred article which often was said to have been effective in days of National Calamity as the people believe. Hundreds of people knelt down in adoration before the picture ...

The heat from the distant fire was becoming awful, the wind was growing stronger, and the flames was coming closer to the danger point every second. General Vivian marveled at the faith and conduct of the people whose city was threatened, and he himself fell on his knees and prayed to God that he would sustain the fire, and prevent it by His Divine Power from crossing the bend. His officers followed suit.⁷⁸

Although the inhabitants of South Bend, along with soldiers from the Christian army, are taking realistic steps to stem the fire, it is evident that the situation is out of control. For this reason, the community places most of its hope in the possibility of divine intercession, offering the combined prayers of all of its citizens in asking for a miracle. Darger piles petition on petition, assembling bishops and cardinals, shrines, churches, and cathedrals in a symphonic plea for the city's salvation. He does so in order to demonstrate the ultimate inefficacy of

prayer. Finally he cannot resist entering the story himself to raise the question, and to give his sad and bitter response.

Prayers were offered by millions everyday, Heaven only knows the number of masses offered, and also Novenas, and Litanies, and Rosaries, and so forth, and yet the rain so ardently prayed for seemed not to come. Many would think of scoffing at the idea of praying for this, as it would indeed be a tremendous miracle, and anyway another thing can be said; "Why is it that people in such a country, people that live up to their religion as they should do, not receive an answer to their prayers?" This question may seem extraordinary indeed, for when we come to the knowledge of millions of prayers answered everyday, and these usually petitions of a kind which do not seem much account, it does seem almost unfair that the people in the country of Calverinia, in danger of losing their homes, their all, and being refugees, should be unheeded when their prayers are sent up for the staying of the immense conflagration. But nevertheless would there not be a reason for that? And who were responsible for the fires? Glandelinian firebugs of course. It seems even to I the author that if this horror was a real fact, a thing going on in real life, what would be the response if prayers were offered for the destruction of the forest fire in this situation?"

As author, Darger's portrayal of what must happen is blunt and terrifying. The city is set ablaze, South Bend is turned in an instant into hell.

As the general reached another observation post he glanced again toward South Bend. He received a shock that almost knocked him out. He felt as if some one had struck him on the face with a stick. The whole city was ablaze ... Everywhere could be heard the tolling of the fire bells that announced that the city was burning. General Vivian in horror watched the tremendous force of the flames and the fire hurricane as they swept block after block and the main conflagration of the forest fire closed in on the city ... It was indeed most amazing to watch the way the flames surged downward into the streets then with a mighty rush tear heavenward. He could see many of the buildings begin slowly to melt and to slide down upon each other from the intense heat. Soon the whole city was ablaze the flames leaping thousands of yards high, making a tremendous heat felt as far as General Vivian was as if you stood in front of an open furnace.⁸⁰

Finally, assuming the fictional persona of General Henry Darger (to be carefully distinguished from "I, the author"), he is asked the question once again and supplies a strikingly compelling answer, a response truly worthy of a great general.

General Darger was asked by his followers on one occasion; "Can you tell me sir, why it is that as you know every offering, every kind of prayer, is offered to Heaven and the horror goes on? You see it seems as if prayer is of no use, and won't it make the people be discouraged, or their faith be shaken?"

"I don't think so." said the general after thinking the matter over. "But this may be my opinion. The enemy are responsible for the conflagrations, and the people know it. God you know has his own intentions, His own ways, and He knows best. I would not doubt it one bit, that Our Blessed Lord, finds Glandelinia's doings beyond His own endurance and that His refusal to answer the prayers just now from the unfortunate victims of Glandelinia has a way, a purpose. I think it might be thus. The people are aroused against Glandelinia. Should He answer the prayers too soon or at all, and stay the conflagration, would not the anger of the country cool down and cause us a further disaster? You know He knows all, He knows and sees the farthest future, and therefore He knows best how to act. It is a terrible thing indeed this conflagration, and the other many and awful disasters, but nevertheless I must say, though you might be surprised at my saying, that I enjoyed their occurrence."

"And why pray my sir?"

"Because through these disasters I see Glandelinia doomed."⁸¹

THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE, as autobiography, purports to be an objective history of real natural events witnessed by Darger. Although it is pure fantasy, religion and the supernatural play a less dominant role in the story. Posing as an adult, Darger assumes a scientific stance in this work, at least temporarily denying God's participation in natural disaster. Adopting the slightly pompous tone of a scientist or academic, he lectures the reader on the dangers of an overly gullible view of God's role in the world. It is obvious he is talking primarily to himself.

In the presence of such fearful disaster there are many persons, even among the most devout religious, even Catholics who do and will say, but also there are some who will think, that this [is] in some manner a visitation decreed upon the communities which suffer for our Short comings before God.

The very magnitude and superhuman force of it will suggest to many minds the thought of an ordered punishment and warning for offenses against a higher power. Yet such a concept, happily more rarely held now than in earlier times, is of course revolting to sober judgement and to the instincts of all religious reverence. For it would imply that countless multitudes of the innocent should suffer indescribable cruelty ...

God does not make or order disasters. And neither does the devil, though it is said he has the power to do so. God won't let him. No sir-ree. These disasters are superhuman but not supernatural. It was but a manifestation of the very unchangeable irresistible forces of nature governed by physical laws which are inexorable. To blame God for this disaster would be rank rash blasphemy.⁸²

Turning briefly from a loving but potentially violent father, to a helplessly cold and emotionless mother, he uses the inexorable laws of nature to account for the terrible destructive forces unleashed upon mankind. The fate of his own mother, his private experience of the problem of evil in purest form, still haunted the old man.

Nature knows neither revenge nor pity. Old Mother Nature does not select her victims, nor does she turn aside to save the good who are in her path. Besides powerful as Mother Nature is she cannot prevent what is going to happen. The most powerful twister, hurricane, thunderstorms, big blizzards and freeze rains, cannot make themselves turn off their course or come head on. She no matter what she is going to do cannot stop herself. And as her concern is not with all persons but with the race, so she is moved not by mercy but by law. Mother Nature has to obey the natural law. There is no way out for her.

To the limited vision of man with his brief life, Mother Nature seems incredibly cruel, heartless, and destructive and wasteful beyond comprehension. Her teachings may be learned at the most fearful costs. Us men will ask ourselves what lessons are taught by this overwhelming sacrifice.

There is made plain first the imitability of natural laws of Mother Nature and the utter powerlessness of man when he pits his strength against their full demonstration. It is revealed again that old Mother Nature has forces which before all the might of human intellect remain absolutely unconquerable.⁸³

Darger's attempt to achieve objectivity in the face of disaster and human suffering is unconvincing. He appears to be repeating something he has heard or read, perhaps a sermon. Seeking to "explain" nature's purpose, he finally lapses into platitude, the stock in trade of the theologian and the church.

But there flowed from an awful catastrophe as this a brighter and better influence than this. With all of its horror and shock there came a great joining of minds and hearts. The whole world felt the thrill of kinship and humanity ... Indifference and selfishness disappear. Throughout the nation, throughout the world, there thrills the uplifting current of brotherhood, the consciousness that we be of one blood.⁸⁴

Darger is no academic philosopher, no scientist. Behind his assumed objectivity lurks the passion of the mystic, and the unconscious irrationality of the child. At the same time that he was writing this curious mixture of science and sermon, and attempting to deny God's role in nature, he was raging at God in his diary for His failure to control the weather. He speaks of throwing tantrums over temperatures that were too high or low, of being irritated by heavy rain or snow. The diary reveals a Darger who is absolutely certain that God was to blame for the weather.

Bad and insulting words towards God because He is holding back the rain. I resolved I'll not recite or read all Souls prayer again until it rains. Sorry, I always keep my word.⁸⁵

No tantrums but saying I defy the Hot weather and the one who sends it. It's a question though who I mean.⁸⁶

Somehow nature and human nature were entangled in Darger's experience, feeling and weather linked, with exterior catastrophe the final outcome of internal chaos.

Indeed the horrors of this tremendous war had been always continually shown by an upheaval of all human nature against nature itself. Very much as if they were the inroads of the sea, or like the overflow of lavas from exploding volcanoes or the tidal waves of overflowing seas, or from cloudbursts hurricanes and tornadoes ... rising up as furious phantoms from the Hellish mists.⁸⁷

BOTH *The Realms* and *The History of My Life* are informed by visions of the end of the world. The grim unreality which Darger was involved in describing all through his life hovered on the edge of that ultimate disaster which God would visit upon the world. Writing from within *The Realms*, Darger could not always conceal his despair.

... Nobody doubted that the end of the world was nigh, certain to come at any day that year ... On almost every page the writers wrote of the approaching end of the world, believing this was the war that came for that time ... Who could even write or tell of the extraordinary forms which certain of these panics assumed. Most of the victims instead of trying to escape, resigned themselves to their fate, did not try to struggle in any way, and even awaited the "end of the world" from which it was impossible to escape.⁸⁸

If the vision of nature in tumult that Darger was obsessed by is threatened by the haunting specter of the end of the world, it has to be admitted that God is, once again, curiously absent from this, the ultimate cataclysm. Faced with destruction, mankind is truly alone.

Found on Sidewalk: Who Wrote It

Is the favor asked impossible without a miracle? Is there something holding it back? If there is, what is it?

—Darger⁸⁹

Thus far, in exploring the nature of Darger's struggle with God, it must be admitted that his uncertainty and doubt, his questions and veiled accusations, seem somewhat impersonal, concerned for the most part with the fate of unidentified children, of Christians, or of mankind in general. While we may suspect that personal experience and private pain may underlie these more generalized concerns, the precise nature of his personal dispute with God has, as yet, not been identified. However, as is the case with all true mystics, Darger's experience of God was, in fact, deeply personal. His uncertainty was derived from private frustrations, his accusations were responses to direct provocation. Ultimately, it was God's failure to respond to his prayers, his needs, his pain, that aroused Darger's anger and his accusations — all the more so because of the intimacy and immediacy of the relationship they shared almost as equals.

IN EXAMINING a life lived largely in imagination it is extremely difficult to ascertain the position of religious beliefs within such a complex inner world. How do religious beliefs and more obvious fantasy-thinking fit together? Even in the experience of the most mundane and unimaginative individual it is difficult to locate religious ideas within the complexity of a life. But given a psychological spectrum which extends from the blunt reality of everyday, through internal states experienced as "real," on into wildly subjective fantasy, and finally to pure

fiction, it becomes impossible to place religious ideas and experiences with any degree of certainty within the mind. To what extent was Darger's conflict with God real? Much of our evidence concerning his religious thoughts and feelings comes from *The Realms*, where even the most objective facts may be pure fiction. That the Catholic religion played an important part in his life is certain. For much of Henry's life attendance at church and church functions provided almost his only form of social activity.⁹⁰ Beyond this it is difficult to make objective observations about what are essentially internal experiences of faith and feeling. How can we document belief, or unbelief?

Fortunately, stray pieces of evidence exist in Darger's room, curious documents which seem to reflect personal religious experiences of a terrible intensity; experiences the "reality" of which cannot be doubted because they involve awkward but prolonged attempts to make contact with the "real" world. At the core of this surprising endeavor was Darger's wish to acquire children by adoption. Given his marital status, his financial situation, the modest environment in which he lived, and his tenuous hold on adulthood, it is not surprising that any realistic efforts he made to adopt a child met with rejection. It does appear that at some point he approached the church with his request and was gently but firmly refused. "The petition is called by priests one of the most worthy ones on record. It so why is it not answered?"⁹¹ It seems he was told he would need to own property or to have a secure job which paid well, so that he could fulfill the responsibilities of being a parent. "[O]n his small pay he never can in ten years save that amount when prices go higher every year."⁹²

Clearly, Henry was grappling with reality. But in what sense was he involved with religion, grappling with God?

The answer to this paradoxical question is found in an unsigned document in Darger's room: a list of questions intended to evaluate his fitness as a potential parent, and to assess the depth and sincerity of his faith. Although a handwritten note indicates that these sheets of paper were "Found on sidewalk," the typewritten questions, and the handwritten answers, are unmistakably Darger's, providing evidence of an agonizing crisis of faith and of identity in the form of a ruthlessly honest examination of himself and of his relations with God.

For a certain man whose name is not to be mentioned here, he is desirous of wishing to have these questions for himself answered, and the questions are these and quite a few.

To begin with, since the year nineteen seventeen he had constantly prayed for a means as it is called for his hopes of adopting little children, and it is now the year of 1930, and his petitions are not yet answered. His questions are as follows ...⁹³

The more than two dozen questions which follow reveal that, in his desperation and hopelessness, Darger had turned to God, seeking through the medium of prayer to obtain the child that reality denied him. For over twelve years, we are told, he had been asking God to provide him with the means of adopting children. His questions concern God's failure to do so. Particularly striking is the fact that in his struggle to understand this failure Darger did not lapse into doubt. His faith in God was absolute. As a result, he was

forced to question himself. In this list of sincere questions he searches his life, his soul, seeking an explanation in his own failures, examining his own feelings of being unworthy. The reality of his suffering is unmistakable as he struggles to understand. His pain is palpable.

As it is really true that God knows a person's farthest future, is it the facts of the person's responsibilities in case of adopting the child, that keeps the favor from being answered, or is it just God's way to try his faith and also his patience?⁹⁴

Is it because he prays for the favor, and yet like a superstitious person expects it to come to him by waiting for it, and not trying to obtain?⁹⁵

Does it require a miracle?⁹⁶

Astonishingly, given the psychological split which protected Darger from knowledge of the darker layers of his mind, he actually considers the possibility that he might not be a fit parent because there may be something wrong with his desire to possess a child of his own.

Is he not worthy enough to receive the answer to the favor, or is he really not sincere in his request, and that children are only an attraction to him, and he does not really love them to the amount to receive the answer to the petition?⁹⁷

Is the attractions for the children, if that is what it is, worthy?⁹⁸

As in *The Realms* Darger questions God's failure to respond to prayers or, more precisely, to his prayers. Why are other less worthy prayers granted? Or are they? While his questions here are timidly phrased, one senses his underlying impatience and anger. After all, behind these questions are twelve years of waiting.

Why is it nevertheless so long that the petitions are not or do not seem to be answered? He has for all that time, all those many years, offered Novenas, said the Rosary as frequently as possible, done little acts of sacrifices and so forth, and yet receives no answer.⁹⁹

He has been inspired by reading in books of so many favors said to have been granted to many others, prayers and petitions that are really absolutely less worthy than his own, having no Charity desire whatever in it, and yet his are unanswered or seem to be, while their's are. And Why?¹⁰⁰

Without being faithless, is that really true that their favors are answered or are they just hoaxes?¹⁰¹

It is, of course, of enormous importance to consider to whom these questions were addressed. Why did Darger conceal his name? What is implied by the penciled note suggesting that these questions were simply "Found on sidewalk"? Did he perhaps intend to leave them outside the church in the hope that one of the priests might respond to his personal torment in a sermon? On one version of the document he has penciled in short answers, as well as the question "Who wrote this." Deeply puzzling psychological factors are certainly at work here. He was evidently on the edge of psychosis; nevertheless the reality of his spiritual crisis

cannot be doubted, any more than the sincerity of his wish to adopt a child.¹⁰²

Desperately alone, Darger in these questions, "Found on sidewalk," is talking to himself. Having "found" this anonymous questionnaire, he fills in the blanks. "Yes to the first. No to the last." "Probably." "Hard to tell." Once again we are reminded of how alone Henry really was in his room. There was no one he could talk to about his desires, his needs, his feelings. And so he talked to himself.¹⁰³ He seems to have understood on some level that he had somehow failed to act, not done enough to manipulate or modify the outside world in terms of his needs and wishes.

Is it because he does not make efforts to try and obtain said petition, or is his request beyond hope?¹⁰⁴

If it is through the cause that he has not the money he desires, is he afraid to try and look for a good paying job...or is it for the reason that he has not the ambition?¹⁰⁵

Perhaps he has depended too much on prayer? Retreating from frustrating reality, Darger had entered fully into an imaginative relationship with God in hopes of a miracle. In a sense his wish was fulfilled, but only in imagination. His children were, therefore, the product of his mind, the child inhabitants of *The Realms of the Unreal*. While we might wish to believe this self-created alternate world was sufficient, this document proves that it was not. Through much of the period when he was writing *The Realms*, we now know, he was praying for an actual child, or children, of his own. He had arrived at a compromise which allowed him to live among children, and indeed to be a child, but the reality offered by *The Realms of the Unreal* was not enough.¹⁰⁶

On another level, but increasingly as he grew older, Darger was alone in his room with God.¹⁰⁷ While this imaginative relationship might prove comforting to some needy individuals, for Henry it involved a host of difficult problems, since this was a profoundly ambivalent relationship which included a great deal of frustration and anger. Even in the carefully worded questions of the document we are studying, he admits to threatening God.

He sometimes does complain, refuses to give in to God's will. Says he will not tolerate a refusal, and demands it, and threatens because he does not receive. Is that a cause?¹⁰⁸

An attentive reading of "Found on sidewalk" reveals that the audience for which it was intended was God himself. The hesitant tone of his questions fails to conceal the fact that he wants God to answer. He wants an explanation. Elsewhere, and earlier in his life, he demanded an explanation and when it wasn't forthcoming all hell broke loose.

ASIDE FROM providing us with a glimpse of an acute spiritual conflict which Darger experienced in 1929-30 when he was almost forty, the document we are examining also provides us with information concerning a far more serious religious conflict that erupted earlier: a violent confrontation which led to a break with God. Given the fact that this piece of autobiographical information forms part of the list of questions, it is probable that it refers to an actual event, a period of some four and a half years during which Darger abandoned the Catholic church and turned against the Christian God.

Is the trial a punishment, or a Cross, because he refused to go to Mass for nearly over four years and a half, and also through the same cause did not receive the sacraments?¹⁰⁹

Was it because all that time he also blasphemed God so often and so foolishly?¹¹⁰

We are not told when this break with the church occurred, but another document fortunately preserved in the room may provide a contemporary account of this crucially important incident in Darger's life, when he became an enemy of God.

"Predictions and Threats"

The loss of child pictures, manuscripts, and rejection from army shall be revenged to the fullest limit against all the christian nations, and their cause will be hit as hard as they can be hit.

"A Grim and Final Warning"¹¹¹

The curious document known as "Predictions and Threats" exists in several versions, at least two of which form part of the text of *The Realms*.¹¹² What I believe to be the original version of this list of threats against God was, however, found in a diary (Tan Time Book), with dates between June 1911 and December 6, 1917, filled in by Darger. In that the thirty-six predictions contained in this document largely concern events which will occur in *The Realms*, the list might be understood as belonging to the realm of fiction. But, in fact, the diary also contains numerous references to Darger's external life, with specific events indicated as the cause

of his break with God. The various accusations and threats contained in this list seem to belong, quite precisely, to the period of four and a half years mentioned in "Found on sidewalk," during which Darger apparently stopped attending Mass and became an enemy of God. That most of the resulting conflict was waged in *The Realms*, rather than in reality, is indicative of its subjective nature and of Darger's mental state at the time. The predictions and threats are reflective of both a severe psychological disturbance, and of an epic religious struggle reminiscent of Jacob's contest with the angel who was God.

The dating of this unique document is an extremely complex problem. While each of the predictions and threats includes a specific date, these dates vary considerably in the various versions of the document.¹¹³ In the versions of "Predictions and Threats" included in *The Realms*, the list begins in June 1912, with the last dated prediction December 6, 1913. However, in the handwritten version of the list found in Darger's diary, he makes reference to his rejection from the US army in December 1917 as one of the chief causes of his complaint against God. The numerous detailed references to specific battles occurring in *The Realms* imply that a considerable part of the book had already been written, with the "predictions" actually referring to events which had already happened.

In incorporating the list into *The Realms*, Darger, for some reason, pushed the dates back by four years, so that his "rejection from the Glandelinian army" now occurs in December 1913. However, it appears that the later dates are closer to reality,

with the final list of predictions being compiled sometime in 1918 or even later, but reflecting events which may have occurred previously, over the course of several years. A good part of the early version of *The Realms* would have been completed by that date.¹¹⁴ Darger's conflict with God may have begun in those years, culminating perhaps in his rejection from the army in December 1917.¹¹⁵

THE SIX CAUSES which Darger outlines as forming the basis for his dispute with God are mentioned at various points in "Predictions and Threats." The most important was his failure to recover the missing photograph of Annie Aronburg, despite prayers and a variety of other forms of petition (see chapter 9). This loss is characterized as the most serious reason for Darger's spiritual crisis and his anger with God. Examined objectively (which may represent an error in methodology), this complaint seems to have served as a pretext for, rather than a cause of, Darger's break with God, as though he was looking for trouble, intent on demonstrating that prayers were not answered. As we have seen, this loss continues to function throughout *The Realms* as the central reason for Darger's inability to support the Christian cause.

It is reported that in case of no return to owner by March the sixteenth, the wicked Glandelinians will not be forced into submission but shall progress better than before, whipping the poor christians to the bitter end. Petitions for the return of same said picture was requested sometime in march Nineteen Thirteen and it is reported that a year from then only can give chance for christian success.¹¹⁶

The importance of this seemingly insignificant loss resides, I believe, in the fact that it masks an unspoken source of rage, namely God's failure to return Darger's lost sister to him. Behind the so-called "Aronburg mystery" lurks his uncertainty about his sister's whereabouts (possibly even whether she was still alive), and his hopeless longing to recover her. This interpretation (never so much as hinted at by Darger himself) does provide a reasonable explanation for what is otherwise an incomprehensible fact.

The first sixteen predictions are exclusively concerned with the lost photograph, and Darger's increasingly wild threats of what will happen if it is not returned. Without exception, all of these threats involve events which occur, not in the real world, but in *The Realms of the Unreal*. At the same time, we hear of an event which may have occurred in reality, the erection of a "mimic altar" in the Schloeder family barn.

Erecting mimic altar to pray before in order to obtain petition before destruction of Christians arrive. Sacrifices will also be made for the granting of Petition. Making the mimic chapel neat and clean no matter how much work. Buying materials of all sorts for shrine. Read Bible every evening, and say all the litanies when shrine is finished.¹¹⁷

Why Darger erected his own chapel and "mimic altar" to pray before is uncertain, but that he did so is, I think, a fact. Was it because he had ceased attending services in the church and yet felt a need to continue on his own, approaching God now on a one-to-one basis without the intervention of priests? Yet, in the same diary entry, he states that he has asked "the Religious somewhere at Sicato to pray daily for the granting of petition," a formal act which probably involved payment to the good sisters. Then, in August 1916, he refers to the altar being thrown down. "Great loss in child pictures on account of it."¹¹⁸ The destruction of the mimic chapel and of further pictures of children then becomes yet another source of conflict with God.

THE SECOND major accusation aimed at the deity concerns the loss of a number of manuscripts connected with *The Realms*. Darger blames this loss on Thomas Phelan, his roommate at St. Joseph's Hospital residence.

May 16, 1916. On account of the loss of the manuscript in September 1910, it is found impossible to cause the capture of Calverinia by sea. The accounts of that wonderful feat was in that manuscript alone, and only the return of the manuscript can cause this wonderful adventure to occur. Otherwise this wonderful feat will be willfully held back come what may. Its loss shall be avenged to the uttermost limit.¹¹⁹

Although Darger later accepted some responsibility for this loss in terms of his forgetting to lock the door of his room, God's failure to arrange for the return of the manuscript haunts *The Realms* and provides yet another pretext for his anger.

"The losses of said articles shall be avenged to the uttermost limit — no chance will be given now."¹²⁰

The final reasons given by Darger to explain his personal criticism of the Christian God concern more realistic events occurring in the outside world, events over which he had little control. The first of these was the failure of Graham's Bank.

Graham's bank went to smash. Great sum of savings lost or threatening to be lost. Loss irreparable, inexcusable. Either Vivian girls or Christian nations shall suffer if money is not returned within January 1, 1919.¹²¹

There is no question in Darger's mind but that God is responsible for the bank's failure. Like an Old Testament prophet, he hurls imprecations and threats with the force of the deity himself.

No mercy will be shown. I am against christian cause, and desire with all my heart to crush their armies, and win war for Glandelinians. Results of too many unjust trials. Will not bear them under any conditions, and vengeance will be shown, if further trials continue.¹²²

Though all of Darger's threats involve events occurring, or about to occur, in *The Realms*, they should not be dismissed as mere fiction. After all, what realistic means were at his disposal for responding to his losses? He could do nothing about the bank failure, and still less about a recalcitrant God. Conflict with a deity has obviously to be carried out on an entirely different existential plane. *The Realms* had to be created as a vehicle for Darger's assault on God. Only in writing could Darger confront his God, like Job, on equal terms. It is clearly significant that the war in *The Realms*,

and Darger's break with the church and God, both lasted about four and a half years. The war that is *The Realms* provided an outlet for Darger's fury and a means for his attack. His destructive rage is no less real for being embodied in an alternate world.

It is deeply interesting, however, to watch Darger switching back and forth from one reality to another, from *The Realms* to the world. For example, the realistic issue of adopting children makes its appearance in this document, but now as a factor influencing events in the unreal world.

Christians will be saved now only if God permits me to gain the means of owning property so that I can adopt children without suffering them the dangers of unsupport. Only chance now left. There will be no other under any condition. Conditions so serious that progress in manuscript is delayed.¹²³

So great was Darger's rage at his inability to adopt that he even contemplated sending his beloved Vivian girls, his imaginary children, into slavery. In *The Realms* he does arrange for them to be horribly mutilated in an explosion at Brigano, and as part of his predictions and threats he actually considers killing them off.

March 16, 1916 passed. Little hope of christian success now. War may surely be lost. Year already close to end it being near November ... Tragedy at Brigano. Cause of Aronburg mystery. Vivian Girls almost fatally injured. Their lives will really be lost on July 4th nineteen fourteen if lost manuscript is not returned by that time.¹²⁴

Finally, the accusations contained in "Predictions and Threats" refer to a real occurrence of profound significance to Darger, a source of deep shame and regret, his rejection from the US army. In the diary this autobiographical crisis is described as follows:

Inlisted into the american army September 20, 1917 in expectation of having chance of seeing great war. Reduced in health at critical time. Failure of limbs and right shoulder to support me in trying to make success in drilling. Eyes go on the bum. Rejected from military service Dec 6, 1917. Receive Discharge papers December 26, 1917. Sent home.¹²⁵

The sting of rejection echoes through these lines; his humiliation at being "sent home" is more than evident. This failure too is laid in the lap of God. "Another cause why christian defeat is impending, most serious break of all. Will not relent in threatening safty of Christians."¹²⁶ It seems possible that this shameful rejection from the army was a far more important source of Darger's terrible anger than he lets on. Certainly, the pain of his personal failure as a soldier, and his loss of the "chance of seeing great war," can be understood to have necessitated the invention of *The Realms*, thus providing him with a war of his own. The endless battles fought over thousands of pages and in infinite detail are clearly intended to demonstrate Darger's extraordinary knowledge of military tactics, as well as providing an occasion for Captain Henry Darger to display his competence and courage under fire. But, for this to be possible, this "real" event had to undergo a sea change as it was incorporated into *The Realms*, with Darger transferred from the American to the Glandelinian army. "Inlisted into the Glandelinian army Sep-

tember 20th 1913 in expectation of having chance to see the great war."¹²⁷ But now, his physical disabilities have been honorably acquired in battle.

"Reduced in health [at] critical time, and wounded at Virginia Run severely, and desperately. Battle a damanating horror. Believe all in heaven could not describe its blood curdling fury. Failure of limbs and sight on account of shock received during great battle."¹²⁸

Clearly, being sent home because of war wounds would have inspired fewer feelings of shame and regret; indeed Darger could still hope for a full recovery and a return to active duty. "Will have operations performed on eyes, shoulder, and limbs so I can reinlist into the army."¹²⁹ In the *Realms* of the Unreal anything is possible.

As author, Darger was in a good position to manipulate unreality in any direction he wished. From this position of power he could wage war on a scale never before imagined. Millions would die, whole countries be decimated. Christians could be defeated, Catholic churches destroyed. Priests and nuns could be slaughtered, and children suffer agonizing deaths as a result of suppressed violence unleashed. And in the midst of it all, God's helplessness would be everywhere apparent. His failure evident.

God is too hard to me. I will not bear it any longer for no one. Let him send me to Hell, I'm my own man.¹³⁰

Hell and Its Inhabitants

"I wonder if any of you boy and girl scouts, and you dear princesses have ever seen a group in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Angelinia Agathia city?"

"I did once" said Penrod. "It is called 'The Two Natures in Man' and the sculptor has represented the eternal struggle as a wrestle to a finish between two great big wrestlers. In the group Man's lower nature is down but not out. Man's Higher Nature stands over the prostrate form, and I came away wondering which will finally deliver the fatal blow?"¹³¹

Images of hell and its inhabitants are everywhere present in *The Realms*, so much so that we are justified in inquiring to what extent Darger's religious imagination was pervaded by visions of eternal punishment in a fiery realm ruled over by the Prince of Darkness. Again and again, as we have seen, the burning forests are transformed into spectacular evocations of the demonic realm, with the solid earth melting into lava flows and leaping flames reaching into space to threaten the very heavens.

[S]o far these raging forest fires have given the whole burning territory the name of "Val Demone," as being the abode of the infernal regions and their spirits ... It was as if the very demons of earth and air and flame were let loose and were to destroy Our Lord's very creation itself.¹³²

In battle too Darger saw terrifying anticipations of the underworld with demons materializing amidst the chaos of mingled blood and smoke. Again and again he calls on the fallen angels as irrational participants in the madness of war, raising human conflict through their presence to a cosmic contest between good and evil.

Did contending armies of demons and angels ever fight like this, and refuse to acknowledge their defeat. Defeat after repulse after repulse ... it hardly could be possible that the war with general Lucifer and general St. Michael in Heaven could have been as terrific as the battle of Francis Atlanta, or Anna Maria.¹³³

The Glandelinians are regularly depicted as devils, the embodiment of pure evil let loose in the world.

[T]he frightful yelling Glandelinians with distorted faces, reminded the christian officers of an army of hellish demons or dream creatures appearing through the smoke, as representations from the infernal regions.¹³⁴

Despite the omnipresence of such comparisons in Darger's writing, hell itself (yet another alternate world) does not seem to have possessed much reality for him, or to have represented much of a threat. When he dares God to send him to hell it is in some respects an empty challenge because he believes so little in the reality of the devil's realm. It is the evocative imagery of hell he is possessed by, its powerful poetry rather than its existence.¹³⁵ Similarly, the devil, although he is mentioned occasionally, seems to lack much reality for Darger. A poetic metaphor for evil, he isn't really present as a participant of significance in *The Realms*.

Almost invariably it is God who is held responsible for all that happens, even happenings of unrelieved evil. At times Darger seems confused by this view of things and tries to reconcile his personal conception of the workings of evil with the standard doctrine.

Is all evil Devil Borne?

General Kindernine had said when he heard of it; "In the startling event of this terrible battle of Aronburg's Run the interrogations fly thick and fast. What had God to do in manufacturing such a tremendous slaughter? This is a natural question in the light of the most appalling loss of life on both sides. This tragedy of the battle of Calverine of Aronburg's Run which seems to have a career in all the ages of human history does not seem to belong to the world of Godhood?"

"The biggest truth extant is that all evil is devil borne. When you take the great dramatic epic of Job and grow familiar with each act in the drama, it is clear as a morning without clouds that all evils of these kinds can probably be traced to the devil of whom a Great man said, 'Going about seeking whom he may devour.' The tragedy of such a battle is not God's tragedy."¹³⁶

The logic of this traditional and convenient division of responsibilities founders on Henry's inability to believe in the devil as more than a storybook figure used to scare children. The existence of evil in the world is accordingly attributed to the world's creator, a unique conception of things which seems to have accorded best with Darger's personal experience of evil and of God.

The shadowy existence of the devil allows him to become a figure of fun in *The Realms*. Even the children are not taken in by his theatrical menace.

"Darn those forest fires" said Mildred. "We might as well say we are in the bottomless pit. It looks that way anyway, and seems like we are souls who are there, but do not suffer the torments. I wonder what we will see next?"

"Maybe Purgatory?" suggested Jane.

"Well let's fight the devil." someone else suggested, and there came some giggles.

"Who'll dare?" cried another.

"I" They all cried in a chorus.

"With what?"

"Anything handy. Just let him appear."¹³⁷

When, however, the devil is embodied in the person of a Glandelinian there is a sudden increase in terror, as the children are brought face to face with evil incarnate. Although he indulges in melodrama, with a theatrical image of the devil derived from religious tradition, Darger also seems to understand the fears of children, and the monstrous figures they carry within.

The whole crowd of children drew back in indescribable terror as another fierce Glandelinian entered carrying a large butcher knife in his right hand. He was indeed the ugliest looking Glandelinian that Violet and her sisters had ever seen. He was dressed in clothes resembling tights being of ink black color, and had hedious imitation horns tied to his heads. He looked like a real fiend, and had a devil's tail tied to his back also. He stood grinning at the poor children, who crouched backwards from him in the greatest fear. Violet and her sisters had never seen such

terrified children in all their lives. Tied around his waist was a braid of human skulls. Violet and her sisters themselves had some fear of this hedious man and recoiled to the darkest corner so that they would not be seen, always keeping their eyes on him with drawn knives, to defend themselves in case they were seen. They were not seen however and the rascal only stood there like a statue grinning continuously and still holding the appalling butcher knife in his right hand. Around his neck also was a braid of human hearts, real fleshy hearts, the blood dripping from them and onto his clothes.¹³⁸

DARGER'S SENSE of justice did incline him to believe in an ultimate resolution of the great drama of good and evil which is played out in *The Realms*. As a child he had been taught that God would intervene at the end to distribute rewards and punishments, and despite His silence and seeming lack of concern Henry wanted to believe in this possibility, with an angry God finally forced to act.

God was angry beyond description over the scenes in Julo Callio, nay horrified even, broken hearted and disgusted, and now was about to hurl his terrible vengeance on the child butchers tenfold.¹³⁹

On occasion Darger plays with the notion of God's entry into the Realms of the Unreal, trying to visualize ways in which it might occur. For example, sacred relics prove effective on one occasion, with religion briefly replacing science, as nature yields to the will of God in stemming a forest fire.

In the midst of these unaccountable horrors the mob became very tumultuous and impatient, and finally by force obliged the Cardinal to bring out the relics of the Crucifix, at the extremity of Evangeline St. Claire in a Religious Profession of great Solemnity, and it is well attested here, that a strong north westerly winds began to blow, and grew to a fierce strong cooling gale, that the progress of the conflagration ceased in that direction the moment the relics were said to have been brought in sight of the flames.¹⁴⁰

Far more frequently, however, acts of public devotion go unnoticed, and God remains untouched by the faith of whole cities. On the other hand, the Vivian girls' prayers seem uniquely effective. They seem to have a direct line to the deity who even contacts them on occasion, for example through the medium of a perfectly conventional angel.

Toward the end of the story, the seven sisters are involved as members of a jury in deciding the fate of a pair of female kidnappers who had made off with little Jennie. Given the unnatural goodness of the children, the lady Glandelinians might reasonably have expected forgiveness for their crimes or at least the minimum sentence. But then an angel appears to announce their divinely ordained fate.

Violet and her sisters and the others consisting of the jury filed out of the jury seats into the jury room. If it had not been for an unusual thing probably something else might have turned up. But as they stood debating over the verdict, what it should be, Violet and her sisters were suddenly aware of a strange person suddenly appear in their midst like a spirit. They

all saw it even the boy and girl scout leaders. That it was really an angel they had not the slightest doubts for it had all the heavenly beautiful appearance of one, it was winged, and held a beautiful long golden wand like a rod and a glow in the shape of a star appeared above it.

"Don't reveal to any one that [I] appeared to you" he said. "Don't be foolish. It is a horrible thing to think of but God is just. Those wicked women have saddened Him and angered Him beyond endurance. I'll terminate the verdict for you to decide. Those wicked women die at the fiery stake. I have spoken."

And to their surprise and awe the angel blessed them, hovered for a moment and seemed to literally vanish into Jennie herself. For a moment they stood there spellbound, and didn't know what to say or do. Then Violet said, "It can't be helped. They die as that fits the crime. Abbieannian laws must be verified. The Angel has spoken. He knows best and we cannot error then as terrible as it is ..."¹⁴¹

AT THE HEART of this great work is a profound and terrible paradox. *The Realms* was called into being in order to provide Darger with an opportunity for the externalization of limitless violence, with millions of young victims made available for the gratification of sadistic and murderous drives. At the same time, it is an encyclopedia of evil carefully assembled and described in order that it might be flung into the face of an impassive deity.

The battle being waged in Darger's psyche was turned into a cosmic spectacle of good and evil, staged like a morality play for an audience of two, Darger and his God.

The Realms is an obsessional presentation of the reality of evil, an endlessly elaborated vision of hell on earth. So terrifying is the constantly threatening environment depicted in Darger's other world that the subterranean hell is drained of its reality, with all evil transferred to *The Realms*.¹⁴² Even the evil deeds of the demon inhabitants of the inferno are swamped in the murderous lust of the Glandelinians. War and natural disaster, massacre and perversion, become the familiar companions of children, with little girls effectively replacing God in the struggle against evil and injustice.

But these same little girls preoccupied Darger for other reasons, as disturbing objects of desire. "Is the attractions for the children, if that is what it is, worthy, or is it the main hindrance?"¹⁴³ On some level Darger knew the answer to this question. If he failed to believe in the devil's presence in the world, perhaps it was because he had glimpsed him, on rare occasions, through the interstices of his own soul. This catalogue of evil is in a real sense an unconscious self-portrait. His absolute certainty regarding the existence of evil was based somehow on knowledge of the split-off portion of himself, with *The Realms* another curious embodiment of knowing and not knowing. Darger's confusion and anguish ultimately concerned God's failure to attend to the evil that he sensed within himself — one Glandelinian among many.

GIVEN THE EXTRAORDINARY intensity of the sexualized violence depicted throughout all fifteen volumes of *The Realms*, it must be admitted that it is all but impossible to conceive of psychological mechanisms capable of assuring control of such impulses over the course of a lifetime, and particularly during youth and early manhood. One of the functions of religion in Darger's life was undoubtedly to ensure a measure of control over his dark urges. Because of the astonishing force of the unconscious drives present in his psyche it is doubtful that his faith and the church could ever have provided more than limited support in his lifelong struggle to remain ignorant of, and to control, his own impulses. His early religious training may well have contributed to the formation of what was an amazingly strict conscience and rigorous, if adolescent, moral values. But these internal restraints would not have been sufficient if other mechanisms of defense had not entered into the formation of his complex personality.

That there was at least one, and perhaps two, periods in his life when he broke with the church, entering into open rebellion with God, points to the instability of religion as a means of self-control.¹⁴⁴ Did joining the Glandelinians have implications beyond the confines of *The Realms of the Unreal*? Did Darger ever yield to his impulses, indulge his taste for violence? Were there occasions, in his early manhood, for example, when he moved from fantasy into action, crossing the defensive divide that split his personality? The truth, however much we might wish to deny it, is that we do not know.¹⁴⁵

The one observation that tends to refute such a possibility is the fact that had such violent and destructive forces ever been unleashed they would have been impossible to restrain or to suppress.¹⁴⁶ Had Darger allowed his violent impulses access to reality, even once, it is doubtful that *The Realms* would have been written. A life lived almost entirely in fantasy is probably possible only if one has never tasted the reality of which one dreams. Writing, and the lifelong retreat into fantasy, was his chief means of action and of control. It is, nevertheless, significant that in this fantasy existence, brought into being in his mind and his room, he chose to include God as a real, if silent, partner and opponent.

Darger as a Christian Mystic

*Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.*
— Job¹⁴⁷

At the heart of Darger's isolation, at the very center of his fantasy existence and his elaborate defenses, lurks a single piece of crucially important reality, his absolute belief in God. However "unreal" the realms he created he could not conceive of a world without God. Although Darger portrays himself as author of *The Realms*, the alternate world he describes is a world created and ruled over by the Christian God. And while this creator-God is curiously absent from his creation, His existence is never called into question. Indeed, it is the paradoxical fact of His existence and absence which provides the fundamental philosophical problem underlying *The Realms*, and an essential issue summoning it into being.¹⁴⁸ To understand Darger's

ambivalent relationship with his God, to grasp the intensity of his belief and his confusion, is to approach the core of his conscious identity and the meaning and function of *The Realms*.

For the contemporary reader, Darger's belief in God can appear to be merely another fantasy, a delusion, though in this case one which he shared with other believers. However, it is essential if we are to approach this crucially important aspect of his life and work that we suspend our disbelief at least temporarily, so as to appreciate fully the extraordinary part played by the deity in Darger's day-to-day experience of reality: the intimacy and intensity of his encounter with God, and the deep anguish engendered in him by God's silence.

While the creator-God of *The Realms* is clearly identified as the deity shared by all Christians, God of the Bible and the church, it becomes apparent early on that for Darger He assumes a deeply personal and unique importance far surpassing His role in conventional Catholicism. Darger's troublingly intimate involvement with the silent deity ultimately takes on a reality that is greater than, and different from, that "unreality" which he explored with such intensity and thoroughness in *The Realms*. The great drama of war and cataclysm played out in Darger's fantastic epic provided a suitably vast stage on which he could explore the haunting reality of God's absence: His silence and His failure to act. The imaginative narrative served as a safe place within which Darger could question, confront, and condemn his God. But, in wrestling with the angel, his doubts and pain were real. It is this fact which transforms the vast spectacle of *The Realms* from fiction into allegory, raising Darger from the naive author of a curiously inap-

propriate children's story, to that of Christian mystic.¹⁴⁹ It is in this somewhat outmoded, yet timeless identity, the mystic's uniquely personal form of involvement with God, that all of Darger's other identities — child, madman, fantasy killer, inspired writer, and saint — are most readily subsumed.¹⁵⁰

The Desert Fathers of the early church were also isolated from reality, seeking God and encountering the devil. Like them, Darger too fell prey to monstrous visions, experiencing irrational and uncontrolled outbursts of lust, doubt, and rage. And, like them, he was strangely innocent, at once a child and a holy fool. His deliberate retreat from the world, his poverty and isolation, his compulsive contemplation of inner reality, and his near hallucinatory involvement with figures arising from within, brought him increasingly into relationship with God. At the very end of his life, when the fantasy world he had created and lived in for so long had all but vanished, when even the Vivian girls had ceased to occupy his mind or to offer solace, Darger was truly alone in his room with God.

In a curious way, this final phase of his life, recorded in his diaries, his last writings, completed the circle, since his earliest memories concerned his boyhood when he lived alone with his father in two small rooms. While he hints that his early experience of the Catholic religion may have been acquired while he was still a babe in his mother's arms, it is more than evident that his complex and frustrating relationship with God-the-Father was derived from his ambivalent response to his own father — the experience his father provided of love, intimacy, abandonment, powerlessness, and, ultimately, silence. It is possible that Darger's tendency to withdraw from reality and to indulge in a

fantasy existence had its origin, at least in part, in the isolated life he and his father shared together. His absolute conviction of God's existence undoubtedly originated at that time and in that relationship. However, it was the long years of institutionalization, and the experience of abandonment and of helplessness, that contributed most to his disappointment, disillusionment, and rage. The fantasies underlying *In the Realms of the Unreal* were seemingly forged in the overwhelming experiences of that time, when his father's passivity and unwillingness to intervene became the model for his conflict and confrontation with God.

Throughout his life, in a sequence of rooms, Darger was never truly alone. Peopling his world, his alternate reality, with figures of fantasy, writing and drawing them into existence, he performed for his only audience, God. It was in this one-sided dialogue, this endless confrontation that Darger matured, in the strange and very limited sense that he can be said to have matured. Retaining his naiveté in the real world, he achieved unique stature in *The Realms of the Unreal*. In that altered, or other, world, Darger was supremely at home and confident. In this altered state of consciousness, so familiar to the true mystic, he achieved the unique situation of innocence and wisdom, honesty and invention, illusion and insight, that permits us to see him both as child and as saint.¹⁵¹

THE ELABORATION of an encyclopedic alternate world such as Darger's, an extremely rare phenomenon, frequently brings its isolated creator into a curious situation of competition, even equality, with God. The danger exists in all mystical experience of a subjective union with God so complete as to result in pathological identification. Those psychotics who develop unusually complex delusional systems not uncommonly experience themselves as God.¹⁵² These megalomaniac changes in self-perception are to some extent justified when we consider the richness and complexity of the creative activity involved, and the changed status of the individual in his new world. Such an enhanced perception of self is certainly present in Darger. But while he manifests an unusually critical stance in regard to the deity, there is no hint of identification, and no sign of megalomaniac delusions. Darger never claimed to be God or divine, nor does he display any special ease of contact or communication with God. The strange intimacy that exists could be described as a kind of negative intimacy, an ability to examine and describe God's creation of the Realms of the Unreal from a position of extreme familiarity, and to indulge in criticism, doubt, and confrontation. But this is not done with detachment or disdain, but rather out of desperate confusion and anguish at God's failure. What is striking and unexplained is that Darger never took the easy way out. He never successfully retreated into atheism, despite periods of extreme frustration and anger during which he sought to break with God. Nor was he able to make use of the variety of ready rationalizations and justifications for God's failures offered by the church. Unable to advance or retreat from a position of truly horrifying confusion and pain, he lived, throughout his life, tormented by uncertainty and disappointment.

THE EXISTENTIAL VISION of another world presented in *The Realms* can without exaggeration be compared with a desert, the inner desert familiar to mystics. We need perhaps to be reminded of the fact that:

... not all mystical states are delectable. Some are filled with anguish and pain; some are turbulent and stormy; some are described in terms of dereliction and abandonment. Some are even dangerous and treacherous and are called "false mysticism" — not because the state itself is false but because it leads in the wrong direction, and may bring the hapless mystic to destruction ... the mystical path has its hour of abandonment, of desolation, of darkness ... What is behind the desolation, the seeming absence of God which we all experience?¹⁵³

Far from an idealized other world of the imagination, such as is encountered in wishful daydreams, *The Realms* as described by Darger is a parallel creation in which all the faults of our world are exaggerated and magnified. Ultimately it becomes apparent that Darger's vision is a depiction of hell on earth, with the Glandelinians as fallen angels, the embodiments of pure evil. Darger is writing not out of imagination but from personal experience, describing the traumatic world of his childhood with unflinching honesty. Obsessionally preoccupied with the problem of evil, he writes *The Realms* as a catalogue of human suffering and injustice, a 15,000-page accusation flung in the face of God.

THE SIMPLE religion of Darger's childhood, the deep love and trust in God and in the church, is embodied in the unshakable faith of the Vivian girls and the Christian nations of *The Realms*. Catholic to the core, the children manifest an uncomplicated love of Christ and His mother, a devotion to prayer, the Mass, the Host, and all the traditional rituals and concerns of the church. In spite of the unusual conditions in a world at war, they manage to live with unsettling perfection and in accord with Christian moral values. Despite all evidence to the contrary, their faith in God and in traditional Catholicism remains undisturbed.

In contrast to the simple faith of the children, Darger's religious concerns are oddly individual and unconventional, focused almost exclusively on an essentially negative conception of God the Father. Unaware of doing so, he moves out beyond acceptable Catholic doctrine, inventing ideas bordering on heresy.¹⁵⁴ In no sense a God of love, Darger's Old Testament God is characterized essentially by His lack of involvement with His creation. Confronted with all but limitless evil, He shows himself unwilling or unable to intervene.

Henry couldn't lay aside his awareness of the injustice of a just God. Unfamiliar with the mystical traditions of the Catholic Church, Darger had to grapple with these unanswerable questions on his own, making use of the simple faith of his childhood, confronting his confusion and uncertainty with his own resources. Significantly, his vision of a remote God unconcerned with his creation paralleled his own experience of detachment and of withdrawal from reality. And yet, ultimately, it was God's silence, his seeming indifference which

necessitated the endless verbal and graphic response of his prophet, Darger, with *The Realms* a desperate effort to fill the void.

And through all this he remained actively involved with his church. He attended Mass daily, took Communion, and went to confession. His obsessional attendance at Mass played an essential part against the ever present danger of acting out, restraining what should have been overwhelming drives and needs. At the same time, it is more than evident that Darger was driven on occasion to play with evil, and that he himself indulged in blasphemy. In his rage he set himself up in opposition to God, confronting Him with ruthless honesty. Risking everything in this conflict, he challenged Him and then awaited a destructive thunderbolt which never came. In a real sense his wrestling with the angel never stopped; to the end of his life he was drawn to sacrilege.

DARGER'S ACUTE awareness of violence and evil in the world, and particularly in the lives of children, was unmistakably derived from the presence of monstrous drives and desires in himself. By withdrawing from the world, the mystic, far from escaping from temptation, opens himself to the encounter with evil in its purest form as it arises from within. Darger, like the Desert Fathers, was repeatedly overwhelmed by such temptations, but by encountering them in the Realms of the Unreal he defended himself against the danger of acting on them in the world. The Glandelinians, God's foes, arise as Darger's personal embodiment of evil, replacing the far more abstract and remote figure of the devil with Darger's private experience of evil unrestrained. While this defensive opera-

tion allowed him to embody and explore his own desires in limitless detail, his mounting excitement at the fate of the little girls, his passionate involvement in torture, mutilation, and murder demanded retribution. In his obsessional and exhibitionistic preoccupation with Glandelinian violence he positively clamors for attention from above. Evil, carried to impossible extremes, surely must attract the attention of God. Like de Sade, Darger utilizes exaggerated forms of violence and blasphemy in a desperate attempt to force God's hand. Again and again he awaits the lightning bolt of divine retribution, calling God's justice down on himself. As a result, the tenuous balance achieved by Darger in his room, and in *The Realms*, hovered always on the edge of collapse.

THE DOCUMENTS "Found on sidewalk" and "Predictions and Threats" seem to provide evidence of such a crisis of faith, of a prolonged period of violent rebellion which disrupted Darger's relations with his God. To the extent that these attempts at a break with God and a turning away from religion can be seen as aspects of mystical experience, they reveal a uniquely personal struggle with the deity, with Darger, as prophet, threatening God from a position of radical independence and considerable originality. Taking a stand in his own creation, *The Realms*, Darger threatens the Christian world with extinction, coercing God with the possibility of a world in which evil triumphs, menacing him with an alternate reality in which his own monstrous desires would be unleashed. At times it appears as if he must fight God off in a desperate effort to achieve some sense of his own identity to avoid being swallowed up. Much of Darger's compulsive criticism of God can be seen

as a desperate effort to achieve some kind of separate existence, a life of his own. The extreme danger inherent in such independence was fended off by Darger's compulsive attendance at church, his regular participation in the Mass and at confession. Throughout his life, and in *The Realms*, one observes an increasingly rapid alternation between positions of acceptance and revolt, belief and doubt, relative tranquility and explosive rage.

WERE THIS STRUGGLE with God and with himself limited entirely to Darger's private experience of reality, it might best be viewed in the context of his personal psychology, or even psychopathology, without introducing the subjective experiences of the Christian mystic. However, mystical experience occasionally seems to involve insights and awarenesses transcending personal experience, visionary insights with a bearing on human reality and the future.

*The mystical life can be described as a journey into the depths of one's being, a journey to the true self and through the true self to God ... if I progress far enough, I meet not only my own little monsters: I meet the monsters of the human race. I meet the root causes of war, oppression, torture, hunger, terrorism. I meet hatred, despair, injustice, atheism, darkness. I meet archetypal evil. And, horrors of horrors, I meet it in myself.*¹⁵⁵

This is occasionally seen in Darger's subjective, but strikingly real, moments of penetration into the nature and future of humankind in the twentieth century. In pursuing his fantasies as far as they led, without censorship and in unimaginable detail, Darger anticipated to an astonishing degree the unrestrained evil of that century: the Second World War, slave labor and the death camps, the Holocaust, and the repeated incidents of exploitation,

sadism, and genocide reflective of the insane destructiveness and inhumanity characteristic of twentieth-century man. Withdrawing from the world and turning within, Darger encountered human evil in its fullest extent: naked, uncensored, unrestrained.¹⁵⁶ With astonishing prescience he foresaw the implications which would inevitably follow were this evil unleashed, as it is unleashed in *The Realms*. "Only enlightened mystics who have reached a high degree of spiritual maturity are capable of encountering evil in this frightening way."¹⁵⁷ That Darger experienced such human evil cannot be doubted, but he did so *In the Realms of the Unreal*. It seems unlikely that he ever acknowledged anything of its "reality," or that he grasped any of the implications of his experience for mankind. As with most mystics the insights gained seem fundamentally incommunicable: confined to the desert, experienced only in that no-man's-land extending between self and God. Darger made no effort to carry his vision into the world. *The Realms of the Unreal* remained secret, with the only evidence of this vast revelation concealed in Darger's room. Like his God, Darger remained silent, remote, uninvolved.

Tantrums Galore: The Final Years

In the final phase of his life Darger's ambivalent relationship with God grew still more intimate and intense as though his retirement had thrown them together. With nowhere else to go and no one to see Darger began to attend church with compulsive diligence.¹⁵⁸ He was going to four or five Masses each day, taking Communion almost daily, and making regular use of the confessional. Although we know that he was visited on rare occasion by a priest, he does not seem to have used the church as a source of human interaction or of social activity. His attendance there seems to have had a defensive function, with churchgoing a desperate means of maintaining control in the face of explosive anger, and possible underlying anxiety. There was an exhibitionistic quality to this obsessional attendance, with God the only audience of concern to Darger. Strangely, nothing in his writing suggests that he encountered God in church. With his involvement with the outside world reduced to a bare minimum it was in his room that he encountered God. As is often the case when two individuals share the same small room, the relationship was not always easy. What should have been the relative tranquility of old age was constantly disturbed by Darger's tantrums, with blasphemy and minor acts of sacrilege immensely complicating his relations with God. Curiously, it was precisely these ambivalent interactions with the deity, his rapidly fluctuating movements toward and away from God, that he chose to record each day in his diary, almost as if he was keeping accounts.

There was, of course, little else to record — meals taken in local restaurants, occasional walks, expeditions in search of discarded string and twine, and, as always, the weather. But if the present offered few events worthy of comment the past took on remarkably enhanced significance as Henry invented and reinvented the history of his life. Writing every single day, he constructed an epic, almost entirely legendary autobiography rich in adventure — yet another imaginary world in which God revealed Himself in natural disaster and human tragedy. Because Darger plays a far more active role in *The History of My Life*, he is brought into more active confrontation with the forces of nature and with the destructive deity he imagines lurking behind them. The writing of this vast account of fire and tornado had become his principal activity. At the end of each day he noted in his diary, "write Life History," as if through the act of writing he could fend off tantrums and perhaps death.

IN THESE FINAL years the collecting, unraveling, and balling of string and cord had assumed enormous importance.¹⁵⁹ Dozens of balls of carefully preserved twine provide evidence of a compulsive activity with obscure but unquestionably symbolic implications.¹⁶⁰ What is absolutely clear is that these tangled strings rescued from the garbage somehow connected Darger to God, but, as was invariably the case, in an entirely negative sense. Inextricable mazes, difficult knots, new connections that would not hold, and the frustration occasioned by each obstacle in the process, were all blamed on God. In the absence of any other divine failure, Darger's tangled strings provided an excuse for tantrums, a reason to be furious with God. The explosions that invariably followed

involved not merely outbursts of anger, but incidents of blasphemy and threatened sacrilege.

Over cords falling down angry temper spell with some blasphemies. Almost about to throw the ball at Christ statue. Blame Him for my bad luck in things. I'm sorry to say so. I'll always be this way, always was, and don't give a damn.¹⁶¹

Henry reluctantly abandoned this activity, perhaps at the prompting of his confessor, recognizing the sinful situation into which he was being drawn by this dangerous obsession. The tantrums continued.

By now Darger was living with constant pain, at times so overwhelming that, with no one to help him or to offer solace, he turned on God as the seeming source of all his suffering.

"Leg bothered too much and hip also. That is why I threw the tantrum most of all."¹⁶²

His absolute belief in divine omnipotence led him to attribute every failure in the world, or in himself, to God. Small frustrations or minor losses of control seem to have been very threatening to Henry. At times we are forced to smile, as a simple ink blot, a slip while walking, a misplaced pair of eyeglasses, or a knot in a string, become the occasion of a tantrum, and a symbolic assault on the deity. Unpleasant or even unexpected weather invariably provoked Darger's fury, with God held responsible for any inconvenience or surprise. Beautiful weather passed without comment.

Bad words at Heaven and defiance of God because of heat.¹⁶³

Bad and insulting towards God because He is holding back the rain. I resolved I'll not recite or read all Souls prayer again until it rains. Sorry, I always keep my word.¹⁶⁴

AS WE READ these accounts, it is necessary to remind ourselves how unique, how rare, such one-to-one interactions with the deity are, except in the lives of the saints. Darger seems convinced that God is aware of his every move, witness to each of his acts of rebellion. It is His seeming presence in the room that instigates ever more extreme eruptions of rage. It is also striking to observe that he now accepts his own feelings — his rage, his inappropriate and provocative behavior — without the need to project them onto imaginary enemies of God. With the Glandelinians no longer present in his life Darger was forced to accept responsibility for his actions, to acknowledge his regular resort to blasphemy and sacrilege as originating in his own rebelliousness, with anger experienced as an aspect of his own character. It is he who has tantrums, not some "imaginary other." Day after day he monitors his tantrums, even "tantrums galore," side by side with detailed records of his attendance at church. It is evident that these contrasting events stand in some kind of relationship with each other, with tantrums necessitating attendance at additional Masses or confession. There is also the possibility that excessive attendance at Mass could provoke tantrums, an instinctual release in the face of too much control. As we examine the detailed accounts Darger kept of his experiences of devotion and revolt, of reverence and rebellion, it becomes evident that there was an increasingly rapid alternation between these extremes, with tantrums and

contrition replacing each other several times in one day. It is not at all easy to explain this curious psychological situation, with contrasting states of consciousness alternating with one another and producing violently opposed forms of feeling and behavior.

The precise nature of what Darger called "tantrums" is an issue of fundamental importance. Despite his repeated attempts to account for why they occurred, he offers no clear description of the experience, other than that it involved a dramatic loss of control. In his diary entries he makes a careful distinction between anger, bad words directed at God, sacrilegious acts, and actual tantrums. Days without tantrums are always recorded as special events.

No tantrums, a little anger though.¹⁶⁵

No tantrums, but complaints against Our Lord, and bad words at Him.¹⁶⁶

Tantrums and disrespectful words against Heaven and God because things go wrong.¹⁶⁷

Because of the loss of control they involved, their increasing frequency (on occasion several times a day), and their religious content, the possibility must be considered that Darger's tantrums were undiagnosed seizures of some kind, so called brain storms correlated with focal epilepsy deep in the brain.¹⁶⁸ Darger certainly felt that events of this kind had occurred throughout his life, though he associated them with outbreaks of anger and with "being bad or willful." In his final years, a day without tantrums and with regular attendance at church was still equated by him with being "a good boy." Certainly, epileptic-like seizures would account for his institutionalization in childhood. Because of the unusual nature of these seizural events, such short attacks would also serve to

explain his ongoing experiences of unusual intimacy with God, as well as the uncontrolled tendency to blasphemy and sacrilege.¹⁶⁹

At the end of his life, he makes it very clear that his tantrums were in some sense religious events, explosions of rage unintentionally directed at God, with reverence alternating with rage.

I was alright [until] towards evening, then because of tangles in the strings threw a tantrum and defied Heaven to make my cross worse and curses at Heaven and God, I believe. Will anything happen to me?¹⁷⁰

The situation was not improved by the priests at his church who understood these events in exclusively moralistic terms.

"Priest who I confessed to said it was a serious sin for what I said to God."¹⁷¹

Henry felt sorrow and guilt about his behavior, although his feelings of contrition alternated with explosions of wild rebellion and a refusal to submit. His diary entry for Thursday, April 25, 1968 reads:

"Nothing went right. A fit of tantrums despite church going, masses, and Holy Communion ... Angry all day. Used awful language. Not yet sorry about it but defiant. What will be tomorrow?"

Even in old age Darger was in revolt.

"I am still that way if not worse. If I am that way what am I going to do? Defy? Defy or not it seems impossible to control myself."¹⁷²

Speaking in *The Realms* of the Glandelinian General Johnston Jacken Manley, he writes: "My defying God might be vain, it is true ... It's true its wicked to do so, but then when my temper is up, I forget myself, and then after doing it I wish I had not done so." This is a strangely inappropriate admission for the evil Manley, but perfectly adequate as a characterization of Darger's feelings about his own experience. His portrayal of wildly contrasted good and evil Henry Dargers in *The Realms* similarly conveys his deep confusion and the absence of any firm sense of consistent identity.

A LIFETIME of such shifting experience of the numinous and demonic might also explain a surprising theme which emerges in his diaries: the idea of his being, perhaps, a saint. Darger never raises this strange possibility seriously, but only in order to poke fun at it. Nevertheless, he returns to it again and again, as though seeking some way to express the uniqueness of his situation.

Had trouble again with twine. Mad enough to wish I was a bad tornado. Swore at God, yet go to three morning masses. Only cooled down by late afternoon. Am I a real enemy of the cross, or a very very sorry saint? Used abusive words at angels and saints. Not paints.¹⁷³

Caught in an endless struggle with God, removed from the world, attending Mass with the avidity of a priest, and obsessed with images of hauntingly unreal realms, is it any wonder he toyed with the idea that he was somehow chosen by God to play the role of a sorry saint, or holy fool?

St. Vincent's Church. I go to three morning masses and communion at the 7:30 mass, everyday, and one extra mass on Sunday afternoon at 5:00, and on Monday I go to the Miraculous Medal Novina Devotions. It too is followed by a mass. What did you say? I am being a saint? Ha Ha. I am one, and a very sorry saint I am! How can I be a saint when I won't stand for trials, bad luck, pains in my knee or otherwise. I'm afraid I was a sort of devil, if I may call myself one, during the bad pain of my knee at night.¹⁷⁴

TOWARD the end of his diaries, his handwriting failing, he mentions periods of severe illness, difficulties with his eyes, and increasing problems with mobility. Was he aware of the approach of death, concerned with the final experience of life, the ritual of dying? About these questions the diaries tell us nothing, though he does mention attending funeral Masses at his church. On only one occasion did he betray an awareness of the fact that he too must die, when the question of his moving to a home for the aged was broached, and Darger declared to Nathan Lerner: "I want to live here. I want to die here."¹⁷⁵ In a real sense, his life did end when he left the room he shared with God.

The kind of death he might have wished for for himself is described on many occasions in *The Realms*. It is the welcome death of a child martyr, God's ultimate gift to a faithful Christian. The conclusion of the story of mad Jennie provides a moving example of such a death, and a touching farewell for us to the Vivian girls and *The Realms of the Unreal*.

One day as Jennie was praying all the harder, and more faithfully, she suddenly found herself surrounded by tall angels with beautiful dazzling white wings, bigger than the biggest bird of the world has. Among the tall angels were some of the very children she had dreamed of at Andrean, who had also been killed by the wicked Glandelinians, but dressed in such beautifully white robes that the dazzling light almost blinded her.

"Save me, save me from the cruel Glandelinians, or take me with you. PLEASE, PLEASE, OH PLEASE." moaned Jennie, throwing out her arms to the celestial ones.

"Within two weeks, thou shalt see your father and mother again." was the musical answer. "And for your faith in your cruel suffering, thou shalt never be captured, and enslaved again, and instead shall be placed under the greatest happiness." Then the celestial children flung their arms toward poor Jennie, and to anyone who could have seen the vision, saw the celestial ones fade away, but poor Jennie was left lying on the floor, while the room was filled with the perfume of a million flowers.

It was shortly before two o'clock and Hanson was writing a message in his headquarters, when he was startled by a strange frightful thunderous roaring sound and by a strange sudden black darkness. Violet and her sisters were playing outside in the slushy snow when they saw the blackness covering the sky, and looking toward the horizon saw a sight that made them scream with fright and dismay. A hideously looking cloud funnel whirling around with

the roar of a million cannon was advancing straight toward Calverine, and screaming with terror they made a dash for shelter ...

Little Jennie who was outside saw the same storm, and being ignorant of its reality went outside to look at it. However, before any of them could save themselves the storm broke with all its violence into the city of Calverine, leveling the houses to the ground and slaying over 10,000 in one single moment ... Little Jennie threw up her arms with a moan and fell flat on her face as a ton of wreckage bore her down mangled and bleeding ...

It was some time before a doctor could be brought, and soon his kind face was bending over the wounded child who was dying, and he did his best to relieve her terrible sufferings, but alas, his desperate efforts were certainly useless. A few minutes after the doctor left, Jennie called her weeping friends around her and said; "I'm going to Jesus, and mamma in heaven now, and I hope you my dear friends to stay good so that we will see each other again in heaven." Then after kissing and blessing them all, and embraced in turn, Jennie, with a happy smile on her face, gasped for breath, and then with a cry of heavenly joy, long to be remembered,

"OH, I SEE GOD ..."¹⁷⁶

12.5 overleaf
Henry Darger
 6 Episode 3. Place not
 mentioned. Escape
 during violent storm,
 still fighting though
 perished for long distance.
 Detail. Collage-
 drawing, watercolor,
 pencil, and carbon on
 pieced paper. 24 x 74
 3/4 in. Collection of
 the American Folk Art
 Museum, New York.
 ©1998 Kiyoko Lerner.



Defects, disorders, diseases ... can play a paradoxical role, by bringing out latent powers, developments, evolutions, forms of life, that might never be seen, or even be imaginable, in their absence. It is the paradox of disease, in this sense, its "creative" potential, that forms the central theme of this book.
—Oliver Sacks¹

Throughout this lengthy study of the life, thought, and work of Henry Darger I have intentionally avoided coming to grips with the issue of diagnosis, in spite of the abundant evidence of severe psychopathology manifested in each of these areas of investigation. In part this was a result of my awareness of the extreme difficulty, without the presence of Darger himself, of characterizing accurately the unique mental state underlying the creative activity of such an extraordinarily complex personality. On the other hand, Darger's private writings, all of them deeply subjective, surpass the quantity of associations and fantasy material that would be accumulated in the course of many years of psychoanalysis. There is if anything an embarrassing overabundance of evidence on which to base a diagnosis. Over the many years in which I have sought to come to know Darger, my ideas concerning a possible diagnosis have changed as different aspects of his reality impressed themselves on my consciousness.

However, the decision to confine discussion of what is fundamentally a clinical problem to an appendix separate from the book is based on a desire to circumvent, or at least to postpone, the danger of Darger's being perceived as a "case study," his work dismissed as merely symptomatic of a particular psychiatric or neurological condition. The

tendency to engage in clinical reductionism, all too easily yielded to, could have seriously obscured for the reader Darger's astonishing uniqueness as a personality and as an artist. Psychiatric labels almost invariably preclude further thought. My purpose in providing the reader with so detailed and extensive a study of Darger's life and work has been to stimulate independent thinking about him, including thinking about the question of a possible diagnosis. I am well aware that this is an issue that will be energetically debated in the years to come. Precisely because of the overwhelming amount of material, chiefly in the form of written and pictorial fantasy, the selection of possible diagnostic categories will inspire endless controversy.

Some individuals, however, have difficulty in acknowledging a connection between the products of creative activity and the underlying personality which gives them voice. Already it is possible to observe a fierce determination on the part of some critics and curators to reject any and all evidence of psychopathology in Darger's life and work, in a naive effort to characterize the artist as the creator of charming images of childhood, wishful fantasies set out in pastel-colored landscapes, all of it suggestive of nothing more than the mild eccentricity of a bachelor uncle. The tendency of psychologically naive individuals to assume that any degree of psychopathology in an artist must, of necessity, preclude the emergence of significant art continues to inspire desperate and irrational efforts at denial.

APPENDIX A: On the Problem of Diagnosis

If I am to avoid this head-in-the-sand approach, I must now declare a position based on the available evidence. Aware of the difficulty of this task, I have been amazed at the confidence with which some self-appointed "experts" have felt able to comment on Darger's psychological state, in the absence of even slight familiarity with his written and graphic oeuvre. Over more than ten years I enjoyed the privilege of almost exclusive access to Darger's writings and to the full extent of his pictorial production. Obviously I have thought during all of that time about the question of a possible diagnosis. Now, at the end of my years of Darger study, it would be disingenuous not to openly share my ideas concerning Darger's mental state. This appendix therefore contains a brief, admittedly tentative, discussion of the nature of Darger's unusual personality, its deficits and its rare advantages.

Divergent Diagnoses

It should not be thought that I am alone in this effort to arrive at a diagnosis of Darger's mental state in retrospect. Over the years numerous diagnostic hypotheses have been shared with me, in letters or discussion, by neurologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts of serious reputation. These ideas, however tentatively expressed, have invariably reflected careful and very thoughtful clinical speculation, and I have considered each one with respect. Inevitably, these efforts have suffered from the physician's too brief acquaintance with Darger's life and work. They have tended as a result to be a response to one limited aspect or another of Darger's behavior or life experience.

It is, nevertheless, of interest to present some of the suggested diagnoses so as to reveal the wide range of realistic alternatives that exist. To summarize them is unavoidably to oversimplify and distort. For this reason I will not associate the specific suggestions with names.

Young Henry's failure to control strange sounds and gestures in the classroom led to the suggestion that he may have suffered from Tourette's syndrome.² The diagnosis was not without merit in that some individuals coping with this disorder over time become significantly involved with powerful pictorial creativity. One must not romanticize Tourette's, or any other disease, nor make a romantic equation of disease and creativity. Creativity is usually in a different realm from disease. But with a disorder like Tourette's syndrome, especially in its phantasmagoric form, one may have the rather rare situation of a biological condition becoming creative, or becoming an integral part of the identity and creativity of an individual.³

The possibility that Henry might have been both retarded and at the same time verbally precocious briefly inspired a speculative diagnosis of Williams syndrome. Since no symptoms of mental retardation were to be found in Henry, this diagnosis, however intriguing, was rather quickly rejected.⁴

Darger's tendency, in later years at least, to assume the name and identity of, and to carry on animated conversations with, characters from his books raised for a time the possibility that he could have been suffering from multiple personality disorder.⁵

The compulsive involvement with writing, in the seeming absence of any concern with communication with others, inevitably awakened thoughts of temporal lobe epilepsy.⁶ Some individuals suffering from this neurological disturbance reveal a marked involvement over years with voluminous writings of a clearly obsessional nature.⁷

Remarkable productiveness was seen in many patients: the writing of autobiographies, the filling in of endless diaries, obsessive drawing (in those graphically inclined) — and a general sense of illumination, "mission," and "fate," this even in poorly educated, "unintellectual" people who had shown no dispositions in these directions before."⁸

Darger's at times terrifying preoccupation in his writings and paintings with sadism and sexualized violence directed at children has repeatedly, and correctly, been associated with the possibility that he was physically abused or exposed to repeated sexual assault in adolescence. This theory reached its most extreme formulation in the unsupported hypothesis that as a child Henry was at the mercy of individuals involved with satanic activities. Fashions in psychiatry regularly inspire the formulation of diagnoses and will continue to do so.⁹ While it cannot be proven, it is highly likely that Henry was a victim of sexual abuse in adolescence, during his stay at the Lincoln Asylum, and that these confusing experiences massively influenced his sexual and emotional development. Evidence for such experience is present in his written fantasy productions, though not overtly in his autobiographical writings. However, a traumatic response to such experience, no matter how intense or prolonged it may have been, is probably not sufficient to account for the psychological deficits and disturbances from which Darger suf-

ferred throughout his life. It is also apparent that childhood disturbances were present well before he was committed to the Lincoln Asylum. It can be stated with equal firmness that the loss of his mother and sister when he was four, while extremely influential in shaping his personality and drives, is not sufficient as explanation for his lifelong psychopathology.¹⁰

Darger's reclusive adult life and the unusual nature of his compulsive creative activity have also inspired diagnostic hypotheses. His evident avoidance of human contact, and his marked rejection of so many aspects of reality, along with the elaboration of a vast and ongoing alternate world, inevitably raised the issue of one form or another of schizophrenia. However, his ability to earn a living and to function on a simple level in society seems to preclude an all encompassing psychosis or a degenerative schizophrenic process. His mental state and his ability to function seem to have remained more or less constant throughout his life.

The radical split between Darger's day-to-day life in the world and the fantasy existence which filled all the rest of his time with intensely subjective creative activity raises the possibility of a circumscribed or "contained" psychosis. The specific diagnosis, infrequently used today, is paraphrenia, a chronic madness which occupies a limited, clearly defined area of the individual's existence, leaving the remainder more or less undisturbed. Freud's Schreber case provides the model of a remarkable individual, *Senats-präsident*, Daniel Paul Schreber, an important, but circumscribed, part of whose life was overwhelmingly occupied by delusional ideas and hallucinatory experience.¹¹ The concept of an encapsulated psychosis held my

attention for several years as an explanation for Darger's unusual mental experience and behavior. In the context of his monograph on Opicinus de Canistris (1296-1351), Dr. Guy Roux of France has recently published a brief discussion of Darger's mental state with an implied diagnosis of paraphrenia.¹² Roux characterizes paraphrenia as a chronic psychosis, with a whole range of delusional beliefs, megalomaniac, magical, and persecutory ideation, tendencies to confabulation and multiple identifications, but with large areas of intact intellectual functioning and undisturbed social adaptation. He also points to the relatively late age of onset of this syndrome, an observation which makes it immediately less suitable in Darger's case. In the meantime I have abandoned the hypothesis of a contained psychosis because, despite the intensity of Darger's lifelong involvement with an essentially unchanging alternate world, the figures of his imagination do not seem to have presented themselves as aspects of a delusional or hallucinatory reality, as was the case with the obviously psychotic Schreber. I do not now believe that Darger was psychotic. In his writings he was always careful to emphasize the unreality of the Realms. On the other hand, it is apparent that the supposedly functional or undisturbed areas of Darger's life were also far from normal. All aspects of his existence were penetrated by his inability to relate with any degree of emotional closeness to other human beings.

In America, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* provides for a plausible diagnosis, at least in terms of certain of Darger's major symptoms, that of schizoid personality disorder.¹³ He "lived the life of a 'schizoid,' given his apparently limited contact with and interest in 'real' people ... I think human contact made him terribly anxious, to say the least. His stories of carnage and torture are consistent with other 'schizoid' individuals who associate interpersonal intimacy with the potential for violence and abuse."¹⁴ While this suggestion would cover many aspects of Darger's adult personality, it fails in some respects to adequately account for the odd symptoms manifested by Darger as a boy.

The apparent continuity of Darger's mental state throughout his life, its consistent development from childhood into adulthood, has led me finally to consider a rather different diagnosis, one having its origin in Darger's fundamental symptom, autism.¹⁵ Infantile autism, a diagnosis which did not exist when Henry was a boy, began to be distinguished from the various forms and degrees of mental retardation only in the 1940s.¹⁶ In its more extreme forms it involves a profound failure to respond to human beings, an inability to learn which massively interferes with the development of speech and various other forms of social adjustment, a pathological involvement with stereotypical movements and sounds, and, at a somewhat later stage, an obsessional preoccupation with very precise and limited subjects and activities. These symptoms are sufficiently bizarre and all encompassing that in the past many autistic children were misdiagnosed as mentally retarded.

While Darger unmistakably exhibited a number of the typical symptoms of early infantile autism in childhood, he did so only to a limited extent. There does not seem to have been any impairment in his speech, and his intellectual development, despite certain oddities, should certainly have precluded a diagnosis of feeble-mindedness, except that at the turn of the century this nosological category was being applied generally to all forms of disturbance in children other than delinquency.

Darger's unusual symptoms in childhood, and later as an adult, conform quite exactly to the less severe form of autism first described in Europe in the 1940s and now known as Asperger's syndrome. This is a condition which reveals itself as early as the second year of life, almost exclusively in boys. In its less severe manifestations it may go undiagnosed until the child enters school when it almost invariably causes serious problems. In no sense a disease, Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder present in the child from the beginning, and giving rise early on to a distinct personality type and characteristic life experience. It is this diagnosis which now informs my view of Darger's unusual, but not unknown, mental state.¹⁷ It is, significantly, a diagnosis which accounts not only for his disabilities, but also, and dramatically, for a number of his astonishing talents and abilities. Asperger's syndrome occasionally, if rarely, coexists with genius.

"Autistic Psychopathy" in Darger's Childhood¹⁸

*No two people with autism are the same; its precise form or expression is different in every case. Moreover, there may be a most intricate (and potentially creative) interaction between the autistic traits and the other qualities of the individual. So, while a single glance may suffice for clinical diagnosis, if we hope to understand the autistic individual, nothing less than a total biography will do.*¹⁹

Most of our knowledge concerning Darger's childhood and adolescence is derived from *The History of My Life*, which was written when he was seventy-six years old (see chapter 1). He wrote this autobiography with remarkable candor, but he was nevertheless reconstructing in retrospect experiences that had occurred some seventy years earlier. Although his memory for this period of his life is surprisingly detailed, his insight into his own mental state and behavior in childhood was very limited, since the severe personality disorder from which he suffered as a boy continued to obscure his understanding of himself even at the end of his life. There are large areas of experience about which he says nothing; much that we might wish to know that remains unstated.

A more objective, if no less limited, view of Henry's situation at the age of twelve is provided by the application form for admission to the Lincoln Asylum, signed by the examining physician, Dr. Otto Schmidt, and by Henry's father. This included the rather vague clinical observation that Henry was insane. As much as we may wish to dismiss this diagnosis, it was undoubtedly based on something other than malice, and was probably a response to bizarre and puzzling symptoms rarely

seen by a general practitioner. Almost a hundred years later, we may be in a better position to account more precisely for Henry's unusual behavior and mental state.

To establish Asperger's syndrome as a diagnosis for Henry's psychological condition in childhood, two factors are essential. It is necessary to demonstrate that his intellect was essentially unimpaired by his disorder, but that, at the same time, his ability to relate to others emotionally and socially was severely disturbed. The second of these findings can affect the first, in that major disturbance in the capacity to respond normally to other people has a serious effect on the ability to function in a school setting and to learn in conventional ways. A diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome also implies that speech and language are essentially intact, if somewhat bizarre and original in style. Henry's father states on the application form that his son began to speak at "one year." In response to the question, "Was the child peculiar from birth?", he replied, "Yes." Henry's high intelligence was not in doubt at any stage of his existence, though it went unrecognized. Even in childhood he revealed unusual intellectual interests, particularly concerning weather and the American Civil War.²⁰

While serious disturbances in relating to others are easily seen in Darger as an adult, it is less easy to demonstrate the full extent of this fundamental disability in his early childhood. Closeness to others, an intuitive understanding of the feelings of other children or adults, the ability to form friendships and to arrive at simple social insights, all these things are notable in Darger's account of his childhood by their absence. Only in his rela-

tionship to his father does he reveal something of a more or less normal capacity to achieve an emotional bond. While we lack evidence concerning his earliest school experiences, serious and bizarre disturbances at elementary school played a part in the decision to commit him to the Lincoln Asylum. However, long before he was institutionalized Henry was becoming involved in behavior that was at the very least spiteful (mild assaults on young children, brick throwing), and occasionally dangerous (fire setting, attacks with a knife). Eruptions of violence, and particularly unprovoked attacks on other children, are common in Asperger children.²¹ Often there is a seeming failure to perceive that others exist and can be harmed by such aggressive behavior. These children display an amazing indifference to the authority of adults. Totally self-motivated and egocentric, they do precisely what they want. Henry stressed that no one could tell him what to do but his father. Some of his childish actions reveal a serious lack of common sense. As a young boy he seems to have had a marked inability to read simple social situations, and no real capacity to identify with or to form emotional ties with other children. Even in his depiction of himself, he emerges as a loner both in early childhood and later in the institutions, where he formed no really close relationships, despite his occasional lists of names of pals. In retrospect, Darger seems to have seen himself in childhood as different and as isolated. Certainly he was perceived by the other children as odd, occasionally dangerous, and even crazy. This too is typical of the experience of children diagnosed as suffering from Asperger's syndrome.

In the circumscribed intellectual areas in which these children have an obsessional interest, they reveal a curious kind of concreteness of thought and language that verges on pedantry. The story of Henry educating his teacher with regard to errors in Civil War statistics, while it reflects unusual intelligence, can also be seen as a manifestation of this pedantic tendency, as well as revealing an obsession with numbers and computing which is typical of many Asperger children.

Asperger children, like all autistic children, can be profoundly upset by change, threatened and provoked to panic or rage by any alteration in their living situation or environment. Henry's violent reaction to being moved to the asylum farm in summer is a manifestation of this inability to tolerate change or alterations in his day-to-day routine. Severe homesickness is a typical response of these children to any change of environment, a reaction that is unconnected to emotional ties to anyone. We see this response later in Darger's inability to adjust to life in the army.

A fundamental symptom observed both in early childhood autism and in Asperger's syndrome is an uncontrollable, almost mechanical, involvement with stereotypical movements, gestures, and sounds. Reference is often made to a repetitive "flapping of the hands." The curious hand movements which ultimately got Henry into serious trouble at the Mercy Home and at school, "like pretending it was snowing," were almost certainly manifestations of this compulsive rhythmic impulse, as were the strange sounds he made with his mouth, nose, and throat. It is possible that these hand movements were misunderstood by the

adults in his environment as openly masturbatory. However, "in the majority of cases [of Asperger's syndrome], there are early signs of strong sexual activity. In many cases, this is shown in masturbation which appears early, is practiced intensively and obstinately, and is not amenable to change ... the children may masturbate in public, exhibitionistically, and they cannot be made to desist."²² The discovery of the admission application confirmed my speculative assumption that it was uncontrolled masturbation which was the fundamental factor leading to Darger's institutionalization and to the ill-founded diagnosis of insanity. According to his father, Henry had been engaging in "self abuse" for six years, a factor which, in the context of his other symptoms, accords with the diagnosis we have been considering. The eruption of various uncontrolled hand movements and spontaneously produced sounds could have been provoked by anxiety connected with the loss of his home with his father and the move to a new environment and school.

Asperger's Syndrome and Darger as an Adult

... in a strange way, most people speak only of autistic children and never of autistic adults, as if the children somehow just vanished from the earth.²³

As a developmental disorder, Asperger's syndrome continues without interruption into adulthood. However, the characteristic features of the various forms of autism have been less extensively studied in adults. Because of his long life, and the extensive documentation of it which survives, Henry Darger represents an ideal candidate for the study of Asperger's syndrome from youth to old age. For the adult phase of his long life we have evidence supplied not only by his creative productions, but by individuals who knew him, and by records at the various hospitals in which he worked. *The History of My Life* provides fundamental, and more trustworthy, material for this period. Nothing in his later life contradicts a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. His ability to function reasonably well at work and in his community, a rare achievement, suggests that he had found ways of adapting to many of his disabilities.

The self-enclosed quality and the massively flawed capacity to relate to others or to conform to social conventions typical of all forms of autism naturally continued into Henry's adult life. Able adults suffering from this disorder are commonly seen as odd or eccentric chiefly because of a lack of non-verbal expressiveness in posture, facial expression, nuances of spoken language, along with bizarre behavior in social situations. Henry was perceived as odd by everyone who encountered

him. To some individuals he was frightening, a fact which led to his being dismissed from his employment when new supervisors encountered him for the first time.

During his adult life, some sixty years, there is evidence for but one close friendship, his relationship with William Schloeder. What little information we have concerning Schloeder might suggest that, like Darger, he suffered from extensive social and intellectual handicaps, and possibly from a form of autism. Curiously, individuals suffering from autism intuitively seem to recognize each other, and occasionally relate as oddly remote friends.²⁴ In general, Henry's emotional distance precluded friendship with anyone, even with occasional individuals who actively sought to befriend him. Striking gaps in his ability to grasp the reality of the feelings of others or to enter with empathy into their lives are embodied in his writings as a fundamental characteristic of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. To the extent that he desired closeness, he found it through his lifelong relationships with imaginary children. Despite its extraordinary richness Darger's alternate world remains an autistic world, his writings providing astonishingly detailed insight into the mind of an adult individual with Asperger's syndrome.

His social isolation appears to have been extreme. Even his more than regular attendance at church services failed to result in a meaningful connection to a community. His manner of dress, his dislike of bathing, his avoidance of even superficial verbal communication with others, precluded shared social bonds. In privacy he pursued his own wishes, interests, and impulses. Like many Asperger indi-

viduals he was a collector, of clippings, of string, of magazines and newspapers, and of all sorts of rejected objects found in the trash.

Not surprisingly, Darger never married and seems to have shown not the slightest interest in adult expressions of sexual or romantic feelings. Autistic adults very frequently remain single, and often show no interest in having children. Darger's longing for children is unusual in this respect, although his naive inability to grasp why a little girl might not fit into his bizarre and isolated existence is absolutely typical of autistic blindness to social norms. The abundance and perverse character of much of his sexual fantasy certainly suggests a continued involvement with masturbation, although he now understood that secrecy was absolutely essential. It appears that at least some of Darger's reclusive behavior and inaccessibility may have been an expression of his lifelong fear of being perceived as feeble-minded or of being sent back to the asylum. His existence was dominated by what might seem to us to be an extreme need for secrecy. However, it is probably an error to imagine that much of this reclusiveness was actually under his control. To a remarkable extent he succeeded in remaining invisible, an observation that could be made of most Asperger individuals. Despite all our efforts to enter empathically into his reality, Darger remains a mystery. Describing his experience of these individuals, Asperger concludes, "They are strangely impenetrable and difficult to fathom. Their emotional life remains a closed book."

Violence: Real and Imagined

We submit the speculation that this association between Asperger's syndrome and violent behavior is more common than has been recognized.²⁵

While pathological violence is not normally characteristic of autistic or schizoid individuals, it can occasionally appear as a significant aspect of their internal experience and external behavior. It has been suggested that instances of aggressive behavior or sadistic fantasy derive from the individual's inability to appreciate the mental state of his victim.²⁶ Lack of empathy with their victims is certainly characteristic of the Glandelinians. On the other hand, Darger's extraordinary involvement with bizarre forms of sadistic violence in his writings, and less often in his pictorial productions, probably derives from unique mental experiences not shared with other individuals suffering from Asperger's syndrome.

Observations concerning the role of violence in Darger's personality are in no way contradicted by his evident love of little girls, or by his preoccupation with moral ideals and his overly strict sense of right and wrong.

Many adults with Asperger syndrome have rather strict, law-abiding attitudes, but in a minority these may co-exist with a lack of empathy that can result in unpredictable violence towards others ... Lack of empathy may also have been linked to the serious, unheralded violence to vulnerable individuals that occurred in a few cases, examples of this included attacks on younger siblings, on younger, unrelated children, on young animals and on mothers. These attacks are rarely understandable ... The attacks were occasionally serious.²⁷

As an example of such spontaneous violence the author mentions several examples of arson.

Darger's lifelong preoccupation with sexualized violence directed at little girls should probably be seen as an aspect of what Asperger described as "special interests," an obsessional involvement with narrow areas of specialized subject matter. Case studies of other individuals experiencing the disorder include accounts of obsessional involvement with poisons and homicides involving poison, or with witchcraft and the cutting up of babies.²⁸ Of the former individual we are told, "his preoccupation with poisons and poisoning has remained rather more academic than applied."²⁹ We have tended, in the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, to assume as much for Darger's obsession with strangulation and disemboweling of children. However, my insistence on taking Darger's bloodlust seriously was based, in part, on the fact that overt homicidal violence is not unknown in Asperger's syndrome. "[S]ome people with Asperger's syndrome commit crimes related to their circumscribed interests ... These crimes tend to be of an unusual or bizarre kind."³⁰ In his study of sixty intellectually normal individuals suffering from disorders of schizoid or Asperger type, Tantam refers to a number of cases in which writing about violence led finally into violent action.

One subject designed sadistic experiments on women, and another went daily to the public library over several months to write a journal containing an increasingly aggressive account of his sexual feelings for women, which culminated in an attack on a woman ... Two others carried out attacks on girls, having written more and more explicitly about their aggressive feelings.³¹

It cannot, therefore, simply be assumed that writing about violence precludes action, or that sublimation invariably represents a successful defense.

Positive Aspects of Asperger's Syndrome in Darger and Others³²

Autism, while it may be seen as a medical condition, and pathologized as a syndrome, must also be seen as a whole mode of being, a deeply different mode or identity, one that needs to be conscious (and proud) of itself.³³

Hans Asperger's 1944 study of autism in children is of particular interest in that he endeavored to describe positive as well as negative aspects of the disorder. Pointing out that "autism occurs at various levels of ability," he observed that it is encountered in retarded individuals, in "the weird eccentric who lives in a world of his own, and achieves very little," and in "highly original genius."³⁴ In some individuals displaying all the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome he encountered "a high level of original thought and experience," commenting, "This can often lead to exceptional achievements in later life."³⁵ Since this is precisely the state of affairs we encounter in Henry Darger, it seems essential to look more deeply at those aspects of the syndrome which may contribute to the possibility of extraordinary artistic accomplishment.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Asperger's syndrome in both the child and later in the adult is the presence of narrow but intense interests. "We see here something that we have come across in almost all autistic individuals, a special interest which enables them to achieve quite extraordinary levels of performance in a certain area."³⁶ These special interests tend to be obscure, strange, and often puzzlingly useless. Because the individual lacks any real social connectedness, these areas of interest and activity remain private, with the individual displaying no desire to share them with others. Darger's obsession with weather and the sky is an example of such a preoccupation. Such an involvement is occasionally verbalized in the form of pedantic, overly detailed and one-sided commentary addressed to anyone willing to listen. Precise observations about the weather tended to be Darger's only topic of conversation. Beyond these very restricted areas of interest involvement with the outside world is minimal. The result tends to be a situation of unusually intense focus on a highly specialized area of expertise. As a result, Asperger was struck by what he termed a "psychopathic clarity of vision."³⁷ These areas of interest are pursued with an intensity and single-mindedness that is clearly obsessional. If the area of unusual accomplishment happens, by chance, to coincide with subject matter of fundamental importance in science, mathematics, history, etc., the possibility exists of the autistic individual making a contribution of importance. "This ability, which remains throughout life, can in favorable cases lead to exceptional achievements which others may never attain."³⁸

A number of experts in the field of autism and Asperger's syndrome mention a symptom which would seem to exclude Darger. They refer to a lack of imagination observed in the play of children with Asperger's syndrome.³⁹ Asperger himself mentioned no such inhibition. Attempting to come to grips with this problem, Tantam concluded, "My experience has been that the crucial element lacking in the play of more able children with Asperger's syndrome, and its later development into interests and hobbies, has been an ability to role play, to switch into a different persona."⁴⁰ In contrast to these supposed inhibitions of imagination is the tendency often observed in Asperger children and adults to "make up stories, imaginary worlds or imaginary play companions."⁴¹ "Many high-functioning autistic people describe a great fondness for, almost an addiction to, alternative worlds, imaginary worlds such as those of C. S. Lewis and Tolkien, or worlds they imagine themselves."⁴² Sacks describes an autistic family in California who "have spent years constructing an imaginary world with its own landscape and geography (endlessly mapped and drawn), its own languages and currencies, laws, and customs." Sula Wolff describes a boy with "a vivid fantasy life, which had preoccupied him for years and was to form an important part of his inner self well into his adult years. From the age of 5 he had 'a dreamed-up island, square and on wheels on the ocean bed,' which he described in a never-ending series of stories and cartoon strips."⁴³ Obviously a similar tendency lies at the very core of Darger's creativity. His special interest involved the creation of stories concerning an alternate world. The Vivian girls were unmistakably imaginary play companions. Clearly, his life work provides an ideal ground within which to test any and all hypotheses and

observations concerning inhibition or enhancement of imagination in Asperger's syndrome.

Asperger's Syndrome and Darger as a Writer

Asperger's syndrome differs from other autistic disorders primarily in terms of its effect on intelligence and language. Already in childhood its impact on spoken language is readily apparent. The first impression is that the children are speaking in an idiosyncratic manner more typical of an adult. Frequently these children score far higher on the verbal part of intelligence tests than on sections which investigate performance. Asperger pointed to the usefulness of language as a means of arriving at a diagnosis. "If one listens carefully, one can invariably pick up these kinds of abnormalities in the language of autistic individuals, and their recognition is, therefore, of particular diagnostic importance ... the language feels unnatural ... autistic language is not directed to the addressee but is often spoken as if into empty space."⁴⁴

As with the disorder itself, the effects on language persist throughout life, undergoing change as the individual ages. The speech of adults suffering from Asperger's syndrome remains identifiably odd, complex, and occasionally pedantic. The effects of Asperger's syndrome are no less apparent on written language, a fact which is of obvious importance in providing insight into Darger's writing, its style and content.⁴⁵ A certain stylistic rigidity is occasionally obvious in *The Realms*, as is the obsessional or pedantic involvement with systematization, repetition of content, and the making of lists. The use of stock phrases is not

unusual, nor is the involvement with puns, invented words, or various kinds of word play. "When making puns ... autistic people sometimes shine, and may even be highly creative. This can range from simple word-play and sound associations to precisely formulated, truly witty remarks."⁴⁶ All of these formal characteristics are apparent in *The Realms*. Naturally, Darger's writings, like those of other Asperger individuals, tend to center on his "special interests," reflecting both the narrowness of his preoccupations and their remarkable intensity. Asperger's syndrome, involving as it does a lack of experience and understanding of emotions in the individual himself and in others, obviously affects the externalization of emotion in writing. To a certain extent this is evident in Darger's idiosyncratic and naive descriptions of his characters' feelings, relationships, and motivations. But it is difficult to ascertain exactly what the effect of the syndrome is. To go beyond these somewhat simplistic assessments of style and content in autistic writing, and to attempt to establish a precise description of the connection between specific disabilities and specific characteristics of the writing, is an immensely complex task well beyond the scope of this appendix.⁴⁷ What is clear is that language and communication are very different and logically distinct entities. It would be of interest to attempt an investigation of Darger's writing, and those of other autistic writers, in terms of a unique form of language not primarily intended for communication. Is this perhaps the fundamental factor accounting for the unique characteristics of autistic writing?

For anyone familiar with typical neurological and psychiatric literature, Hans Asperger's essay stands out as extraordinary in terms of his dazzlingly original involvement with characterizing the positive values of what he termed "autistic originality." In the intelligent autistic children he encountered he was obviously struck by evidence of unusual originality reflective of unique mental processes. He emphasized their "independence of thought, experience, and speech." "Their thoughts can be unusually rich. They are good at logical thinking."⁴⁸ Of one such child he writes, "He liked to tell fantastic stories in which he always appeared as the hero."⁴⁹ Of another he says, "he told long, fantastic stories, his confabulations becoming ever more strange and incoherent."⁵⁰ These cases tend to support the hypothesis put forward earlier that Darger's involvement with storytelling, and possibly with writing, may have begun in childhood well before the writing of *The Realms* got underway.

Of major importance for our understanding of links between Darger's mental state and his creativity is Asperger's ingenious analysis of the underlying causes of "autistic originality." He focuses on the relationship between the inability to relate to others and curious anomalies in the ability to learn from others or from society. "If somebody can only experience in an original way, and if he can only be 'his own self' rather than feel himself to be an integral part of the world ... then he is *unable to learn*. He cannot assimilate the ready-made knowledge and skill that others present to him."⁵¹ In individuals equipped with unusual intelligence, this block in the ability to acquire knowledge or to think in conventional ways inevitably leads to highly unusual, not to say bizarre, modes of intel-

lectual functioning and creativity. Everything must be newly invented. As Asperger points out, "Behind the originality of language formulations stands the originality of experience. Autistic children have the ability to see things and events around them from a new point of view, which often shows surprising maturity."⁵² He might almost have been speaking of the Vivian girls when he wrote, "The problems these children think about are usually far beyond the interests of children of the same age."⁵³

Darger's Pictorial Art and Asperger's Syndrome

*Aware adults with autism and their parents are often angry about autism. They may ask why nature or God created such horrible conditions as autism, manic depression, and schizophrenia. However, if the genes that caused these conditions were eliminated, there might be a terrible price to pay. It is possible that persons with bits of these traits are more creative, or possibly even geniuses.*⁵⁴

Unfortunately, Asperger did not pursue "autistic originality" into the realm of pictorial art. Graphic activity and involvement with images is by no means unknown in the various forms of autism, but only the more spectacular cases inspire intensive investigation. Two such cases have surfaced in recent years, that of child artists Nadia and Stephen Wiltshire.⁵⁵ Both cases belong less to the realm of Asperger's syndrome than to the classic and more debilitating form of autism described by Kanner. Both represent astonishing, and essentially unexplainable, departures from the norms of children's art. However, neither of these talented

artists created images of real artistic importance.⁵⁶ In this respect Darger stands alone as a pictorial artist of genius. Does the diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome provide any insight at all into his extraordinary creative accomplishment?

In terms of a direct response to this question, Asperger's essay provides one observation of importance. "Another distinctive trait one finds in some autistic children is a rare maturity of taste in art ... Autistic individuals can judge accurately the events represented in the picture, as well as what lies behind them, including the character of the people represented and the mood that pervades a painting. Consider that many normal adults never reach this mature degree of art appreciation."⁵⁷ If such accomplishments in aesthetic perception are apparent in even occasional Asperger children (and many experts in the field would challenge this⁵⁸), what might we expect of the development of these sensitivities in an adult? Are similar capacities ever observable in the creative process and products of adult Asperger artists?

What seems to be implied by Asperger's controversial observation is that at least occasional high-functioning autistic children are able to enter into the reality of pictures in ways which would be impossible for them in the actual world of human emotions and relationships. Pictures, operating at a considerable remove from reality, may offer these rare individuals the possibility of experiencing human feelings and interactions otherwise closed to them.⁵⁹ Darger unmistakably exploited this otherworldly character of pictures in elaborating an alternate world over the course of a lifetime in which he could function in relative safety. Even the most dangerous and frightening of human interactions, those occurring between adult men and pre-pubescent girls, could be explored and depicted through the use of images. He was able not only to perceive but to manipulate a wide range of moods through his exceptional sensitivity to color. However, while he possessed these abilities to a degree vastly surpassing that possessed by "normal adults," these are powers one also anticipates in non-autistic professional artists of exceptional ability. Is there anything uniquely autistic about Darger's creativity?

The answer to this fundamental question is to be found precisely in the inability to learn by conventional means which Asperger identified as the basis for the unavoidable originality observed in the speech and other products of individuals with Asperger's syndrome. Again and again I have stressed the extent to which Darger, step by step, reinvented art. It was not only that he knew nothing of art, that he was untrained, it was that he lacked any capacity to learn from, or to make use of, the experience of other artists and their art. It is a commonplace of art history that art derives from art, that, for the most part, unconscious traditions of representation and of procedure are handed down from generation to generation, with even partial innovation a rare occurrence in art. What happens when, because of an unusual developmental disorder, this pattern is broken, with pictorial conventions, traditional methods of approach, everything that can be learned about art, rendered invisible? This is precisely the complex problem which this book has sought to explore. The diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome is of unique value in giving a name to, and in defining in clinical terms, the astonishing mental state, the unconventional creative processes, and the accompanying alternate reality which was the world of Henry Darger.

APPENDIX B: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Writings of Henry J. Darger

prepared by John M. MacGregor and
Betsey Wells Farber

In February 2001, all of the writings of Henry Darger were moved permanently from his room in Chicago to the Henry Darger Research Archive of the Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. This new home for Darger's writings, which guarantees the safety of the priceless original manuscripts, fulfilled a long-held dream of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner. The generous gift came about as a result of the determined efforts of the President of the American Folk Art Museum, Gerard Wirtkin, the trustees of the museum, headed by trustee Sam Farber, the trustees of the Nathan Lerner Living Trust, and Mrs. Kiyoko Lerner. The gift included Darger's three major written works, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, and *The History of My Life*, as well as a large number of subsidiary manuscripts and personal papers.

Each of Darger's huge manuscripts are preserved now in the somewhat confusing form in which he left them. This is especially true of *The Realms*, in that the final sequence of volumes and chapters was left unsettled by Darger, with several volumes lacking either a title page or a volume number. Darger often moved huge sections of his manuscripts about within a work, and large fragments were left out, perhaps to be fitted in later. The various numbering systems encountered on many pages provide evidence of evolutionary developments in the writing history of *The Realms*. Three volumes (nine, twelve, and thirteen, the final volume) were identified after careful reading of all of the unbound manuscripts. The identification of these volumes is still uncertain, and later studies may yet relocate them in the sequence. Two additional large fragments, volume A (typewritten) and the huge

handwritten manuscript entitled "Amazing Phenomena Connected with the Enormous Battle of Dolorine Costellio," have not been fitted into the sequence. Also forming part of *The Realms* are large sections of handwritten manuscript, which Darger later typed into the finished volumes, as well as other handwritten fragments which he did not include. There is also a large "planning journal" which Darger used to keep track of the thousands of characters, battles, deaths, and events occurring in the various volumes of *The Realms*.¹

Darger's two other major written works, *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, and *The History of My Life*, are in better order and present fewer problems to the reader. Nevertheless, each of these is accompanied by associated fragments, which were not included by Darger in the numbered volumes. Darger's "Weather Books" also form part of the archive. They are not narrative writings, but simply his personal records of Chicago weather, written out day by day, and occasionally accompanied by humorous comments. Darger's diaries, and personal documents which he saved over the years, are also preserved, and along with all of the original manuscripts are available for research or consultation at the museum.

The catalogue of Darger's writings which follows has been arranged by the museum in more or less chronological fashion in a set of forty-one numbered boxes, and the lists of writings below locate the individual manuscripts according to the box numbers.

Section A:
In the Realms of the Unreal
Bound volumes one–seven

Box 1: volume one (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–unnumbered.

The total page count: 644. Perfect continuity can be established with volume two.

Box 2: volume two (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–955.

The total page count: 915. Perfect continuity can be established with volume one and with volume three.

Box 3: volume three (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–1012.

The total page count: 1162. There is clear continuity with volume two.

Box 4: volume four (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–1689.

The total page count: 1577. This is the largest bound volume. There is no obvious continuity with volume three.

Box 5: volume five (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–858 + 1.

The total page count: 862. Continuity is clear with volume four and there is perfect continuity with volume six.

Box 6: volume six (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–850.

The total page count: 933. There is perfect continuity with volume five and with bound volume seven.

Box 7: volume seven (bound) includes Darger pp. 1–1187.

The total page count: 1176. This is the final bound volume. There is clear continuity with volume six and perfect continuity with volume eight (unbound).

Section B:
In the Realms of the Unreal
Unbound volumes eight–thirteen

Box 8: volume eight (unbound) includes Darger pp. 1–unnumbered.

The total page count: 836. MacGregor page numbers: 8-1/8–418. There is clear continuity with volume seven (bound).

Box 9: volume nine (?) (unbound) includes Darger pp. 1–unnumbered.

The total page count: 2164. MacGregor page numbers: 9-1/9–1082. In the absence of a title page or identifying volume number, identification of this volume by Dr. MacGregor as volume nine must remain tentative (as of February 2001). This volume was formerly known as volume C.

Box 10: volume ten, part one (unbound) includes Darger pp. 1–855.

The total page count: 862. MacGregor page numbers: 10-1/10–431. Darger himself identified this as volume ten, identifying the next volume as volume ten, part two. There are, accordingly, two volumes ten, part one, and part two, and two boxes containing them.

Box 11: volume ten, part two (unbound) includes Darger pp. 2007–850.

The total page count: 944. MacGregor page numbers: 10-1/10–475. Continuity with volume ten, part one is arrived at using the old page numbering system (p. 2006, inside of part one), and the fact that this volume begins with p. 2007. Clear continuity is evident with volume eleven.

Box 12: volume eleven (unbound) includes Darger pp. 1–870.

The total page count: 908. MacGregor page numbers: 11-1/11–453. Continuity from volume ten, part two, to volume eleven is clear. This was the last volume numbered by Darger.

Box 13: volume twelve (?) (unbound) includes Darger pp. 2254–2914.

The total page count: 1210. MacGregor page numbers: 7-1/7–601. In the absence of a title page or identifying volume number the identification of this volume by Dr. MacGregor as volume twelve must remain tentative (as of February 2001). At some point in the evolution of *The Realms*, Darger entitled this manuscript "Volume Seven," despite the fact that there is also a bound volume seven, with continuity between that and volume eight. Careful study of the text of this volume suggests that it is in fact the second to last volume of *The Realms*. This volume was previously known as volume seven (unbound).

Box 14: volume thirteen (?) (unbound) Includes Darger pp. 2916-3545.

The total page count: 652. MacGregor page numbers 13-1/13-314. In the absence of a title page or an identifying volume number, the identification of this volume by Dr. MacGregor as volume thirteen must remain tentative (as of February 2001). This is clearly the final volume of *The Realms*, with the story brought to a firm conclusion. This volume was previously known as volume B.

Box 15: Unidentified typed volume of *The Realms*, presently known as A.

It includes Darger page numbers (most pp. unnumbered), but including pp. 2155-2943 and 4003-4008. Pages A-175/A-82a seem to represent a fragmentary chapter (not evident where it might fit). The volume ends with an unconnected group of songs. The total page count: 364 + songs. MacGregor page numbers A-1/A-199. The pp. in this "volume" are seriously out of sequence, and no effort has ever been made to establish page continuity. This will have to be done before this material can be fitted into the sequence of the thirteen volumes of *The Realms*.

**Section C:
Handwritten Manuscript later typed
into *The Realms***

Box 16: Contains the following five documents:

1. An unbound Register Book (cover missing). Pages with printed numbers: A-Z, and 1-382. Title: "In a Child Slave Plantation." Dated by Henry, October 27, 1926. (Handwritten text on pp. A-Z and 1-276.) The total page count: 328. This sequence of handwritten chapters later appears, with little change, in volume nine of *The Realms*, starting on p. 598 and continuing.

2. Bound, gray cloth-covered Register Book (12 1/2 inches x 8 inches) with printed label, "National 892" inside of front cover. Pages with printed numbers 1, A-Z, and 1-84. Title: "Strange Incidents in St. Claires Plantation." Dated by Henry, January 22, 1927. (Handwritten text on pp. 1, A-Z, and 1-84). Exact continuity has been established with #1 above. The total page count: 138. This sequence of handwritten chapters later appears, with little change, in volume nine of *The Realms*, starting with "Strange Incidents in St. Claires Plantation".

3. Bound, gray cloth-covered Register Book (12 1/2 inches x 8 inches) with printed label, "National 892" inside of front cover. Pages with printed numbers 1, A-Z, and 1-84 (Identical to #2 above). Titled by Henry, "Did Jannie find out who her master was?" Dated by Henry, March 1, 1927, with additional dates running to April 1, 1927. The total page count: 136. This sequence of handwritten chapters later appears, with little change, in volume nine of *The Realms*, starting on p. 9-641. Continuity with #2 above can be established with certainty. (This

volume is presently not in the AFAM Darger Archives. As of February 2001 it was being offered for sale on the art market in New York.)

4. Unbound Register Book (cover missing). Darger identified it as "Book 4." Pages with printed numbers, E-Z, and 1-384. Entitled by Darger "The Plantation is Abandoned." Dated by Darger, April 5, 1927. (Handwritten text appears on pp. 1, E-Z, and 1-272, followed by blank pp. 273-384.) Exact continuity with #3 above can be established. Total page count: 320. This sequence of handwritten chapters later appears, with little change, in volume nine of *The Realms*, starting on p. 728, "The Plantation is Abandoned."

5. A huge, very heavy, bound Register Book (14 1/4 inches x 9 1/2 inches), labeled "National 893 1/2" on the inside front cover. Pages with printed numbers 1-800. Entitled by Henry, "Mullencat State Calverinia. Explosion, flood, and fire, 700,000 lives lost." Dated by Darger, November 23, 1927. (Handwritten text appears on pp. 1-474 followed by blank pages, 475-800.) (This manuscript does not follow upon #4 above.) The total page count: 474. This huge Register actually contains three distinct sections of manuscript belonging to different parts of the typewritten *Realms*.

i. The section entitled "Mullencat State Calverinia", pp. 1-95, was later typed, with little change, into volume nine of *The Realms*, starting on p. 785, "Mullencat State Calverinia, Explosion, flood, and fire." See volume nine, pp. 785, 795, 802, 805, 808, 811, 814, and 816.

ii. The second section of this manuscript, beginning on p. 98, is entitled, "Chapter 1, Introducing an Attempt of Violet and her Sisters to find out who is Responsible for the Flood Disasters." This section runs through pp. 98-439, and contains a very long sequence of chapters from *The Realms*, volume seven (bound), chapter 22 to chapter 32 part two.

iii. The third section of this manuscript, beginning on p. 441, is entitled "Chapter One, Further Adventures in Chicago," and probably forms part of the Darger book, *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.

Section D: Unidentified, Handwritten Fragments of *The Realms*

Box 17: Contains the following four manuscripts:

1. Manuscript entitled, "Amazing Phenomena Connected with the Enormous Battle of Dolorine Costellio." This consists of a set of ring-binder pages tied together with string, and numbered by Darger, pp. 1-839. Although the Battle of Dolorine Costellio does occur in volume two of *The Realms*, chapter 8, there is no obvious connection between the short account of that battle typed into *The Realms*, and this colossal handwritten manuscript, which is essentially an entire volume in itself.

2. Small blue-black "Keystone" ring-binder (8 5/16 inches x 11 inches) with pages numbered by Darger, 840-957, thus establishing exact continuity with the previous volume. The end of this binder contains blank pages.

3. Bound Register Book, with handwritten indication of previous ownership inside of front cover, H. E. Nilsson (8 5/8 inches x 14 inches). Titled by Darger, "No. One." This fragment on pp. 11-46, clearly belongs to *The Realms*, although it is not clear where it might fit, or whether it was ever used. A second fragment entitled by Darger, "No. Two," on pp. 47-143, probably belongs to *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.

4. Tiny "Compositions" book, entitled by Darger on the outside front cover, Battle of Eva Sainte Claire (8 1/2 inches x 7 inches).

Section E: Darger's "Planning Journal" for *The Realms*

Box 18: Contains one large Register Book (binding badly broken) (12 1/2 inches x 7 5/8 inches).

Entitled by Darger on outside front cover, "Please Return this Book to Its Proper Place. This Means you Henry D." The first part of the book, pp. 181-273, consists of Henry copying the questions and answers of the Catechism of Christian Doctrine. Pages 274-275 contain a letter written by Gertrude Angeline, after which various sections enable Henry to keep track of the characters, battles, deaths, and other events, occurring throughout *The Realms*.

Section F: *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*

(A handwritten manuscript by Henry J. Darger, in 16 volumes.) This book, *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, was previously identified as "The Vivian Girls in Chicago." However, newly discovered manuscript material has provided two distinct names for this book, both invented by Darger, and they are accordingly both being used.

Box 19: volume one (bound). (Title page missing.)

Darger pp. 1-5643 [page 1, chapter 1]

Box 20: volume two

Darger pp. 5644-8213

Box 21: volume three

Darger pp. 8214-8498

Box 22: volume four

Darger pp. 8499-9531

Box 23: volumes five through fifteen

volume five, Darger pp. 9524-9900

volume six, Darger pp. 9901-9944

volume seven, Darger pp. 9945-10036

volume eight, "Devil House," Darger pp. 10037-10089

volume nine, "Crazy House," Darger pp. 10090-10138

volume ten, "Crazy House," Darger pp. 10139-10186

volume eleven, Darger pp. 10187-10283

volume twelve, Darger pp. 10284-10374

volume thirteen, Darger pp. 10375-10414

volume fourteen, Darger pp. 10415-10453.

volume fifteen, Darger pp. 10454-10461

Box 24: volume sixteen

Darger pp. 10462-10531. This is the final volume.

No part of the book is missing.

**Section G:
Handwritten Manuscript Fragments
seemingly associated in some way
with the book *Further Adventures in
Chicago: Crazy House***

No box: For this material, see the following:

1. Box 16, Manuscript 5, Section 3, pp. 441-474, for a possible fragment.
2. Box 17, Manuscript 3, Section 2, pp. 47-143, which may also form part of *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.

**Section H:
*The History of My Life***

(Handwritten manuscript in eight volumes, by Henry J. Darger)

Box 25: volume one

This volume begins with "Descriptions from the Holy Bible, pp. 1-37. Then a new set of pages, 1-206, actually deals with Darger's account of the details of his life. The following pages, 206-1183, begins the vast story of a tornado which eventually comes to be known as "Sweetie Pie." The story of this tornado hitting cities (some real, some imaginary) then fills all of the remaining volumes of this book.

Box 26: volume two

Darger pp. 1184-2631

Box 27: volume three

Darger pp. 2631-3120

Box 28: volume four

Darger pp. 3121-4275

Box 29: contains volumes five through seven.

volume five, Darger pp. 4276-4309

volume six, Darger pp. 4309-4368

volume seven, Darger pp. 4369-4912

Box 30: volume eight

Darger pp. 4913-5084. This completes the account of the Tornado "Sweetie Pie."

**Section I:
Loose Manuscript (Handwritten Pages)
associated in some way (unclear) with
the book *The History of My Life***

(Additional pages dealing with the tornado Sweetie Pie.)

Box 31: This box contains an enormous pile of numbered handwritten pages, numbered by Darger, but untitled. (5 1/2 inches x 8 1/2 inches). These pages when found were entirely out of order, with numbers reaching into the 4000's. Page numbering is wildly erratic, with the same numbers used again and again. Anyone seeking to work with this manuscript will need to study the page sequences, and attempt to get the manuscript in order — a massive task.

Box 32: A fragment of *The History of My Life*.

This fragment consists of a smaller pile of newsprint manuscript with the pages accidentally glued together. Darger page numbers run from 19489 to 19625 or 1-136, plus several loose but associated pages.

Section J: Diaries

Box 33: Contains the following five handwritten manuscripts:

1. A small brown book, with the printed title on the front cover, "Time Book Monthly" (H 8 inches, W 5 inches, Spine 1/2 inch). Extremely important: It contains "Predictions" dated June 1911–December 1917.

2. Bound, olive-green, "Desk Diary," dated by Darger, March 24, 1968–February 21, 1969 (H 6 inches, W 4 1/2 inches, spine 1 inch). This diary, of unique importance, was stolen from Darger's room in 2000. It is therefore presently unavailable for study in the Darger Research Archive at AFAM.

3. De Paul Ring-Binder Blue (H 11 inches, W 8 inches, Spine 2 inches). Entitled by Darger, "Continuation of my Diary." Dated by Darger, Saturday February 22, 1969, to January 1, 1972. This diary is a continuation of the stolen volume #2 above.) Pages numbered by Darger 1–28.

4. Penworthy Composition Book (W 8 3/4 inches x H 11 inches). "Property of Henry Jos. Dargarius (Hendro)" This book contains lists of Darger's favorite songs, plus Abbieanian song titles, followed by copied religious texts.

5. Darger's personal copy of the Holy Bible, containing his penciled notations on the Family Record Page. This Bible, with its important record, is not, at present, in the Archive.

Section K: Darger Private Documents

Box 34: Contains individual documents of extreme importance and rarity. Most are composed, typed, or handwritten by Darger himself.

Box 35: Less personal private documents: pay forms, letters, tax information, etc.

Section L: The "Weather Books"

Box 36: volume one

Dated by Darger, December 31, 1957–December 27, 1960.

Box 37: volume two

Dated by Darger, May 31, 1962–November 15, 1963. Darger writes: "Continued from Book One preceded from stolen book." (This may explain the break between volumes one and two.)

Box 38: volume three

Dated by Darger, November 16, 1963–October 31, 1964.

Box 39: volume four

Dated by Darger: November 1, 1964–December 31, 1965.

Box 40: volume five

Dated by Darger, January 1, 1966–December 31, 1966.

Box 41: volume six

Dated by Darger: January 1, 1967–December 31, 1967. Final page marked by Darger, "Finish."

This completes the list of all known surviving books and manuscripts originally found in Henry Darger's room, and preserved for posterity by Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Lerner.

Preface

¹ C. L. Morrison, *Realms of the Unreal: The Work of Henry Darger*, Chicago, Hyde Park Art Center, 1977.

² Though I did write the first book on Henry Darger, *Henry J. Darger: Dans les Royaumes de l'irréel*, Lausanne, Collection de l'Art Brut, 1996, which also appeared in separate Italian (1996) and Japanese (2000) editions, the honor of publishing the first book in English was awarded to Michael Bonesteel, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000.

³ Since his death, Nathan Lerner's work as an artist has begun to receive serious critical reappraisal, with major exhibitions devoted to his photography, his paintings and drawings, as well as his design and architectural projects. See Steven Prokopoff, *Nathan Lerner's Maxwell Street*, University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1993, and Astrid Böger and Roger Manley, *Modernist Eye: The Art and Design of Nathan Lerner*, Raleigh, North Carolina State University, 2000.

⁴ In that the writing of this book was completed more than three years ago, it has been necessary to bring it up to date in terms of recent Darger scholarship. While no changes have been made to the text, a small number of footnotes have been added, the Selected Bibliography has been enlarged to include a number of more recent publications of significance, and finally, with the assistance of Betsey Wells Farber, working with me in the new Darger Research Archives in February 2001, a Catalogue Raisonné of the Writings of Henry J. Darger has been added to the book (with the permission of the Trustees of the American Folk Art Museum), as Appendix B.

Introduction

¹ *The Realms*, vol. eight (unbound), p. 8-268 (533). Page references to *The Realms* giving volume number followed by page number are my own, imposed on the work with the permission of Nathan Lerner. The number in brackets follows Darger's own chaotic and often overlapping pagination systems.

² For a sampling of critical response in New York, see Tessa Decarlo, "The Bizarre Visions of a Reclusive Master," *New York Times*, Sunday, January 12, 1997, p. 43; Holland Cotter, "A Life's Work in Word and Image, Secret until Death," *New York Times*, Friday, January 24, 1997; A. M. Homes, "Inside Out: the Art of Henry Darger," *Artforum*, 36: 9 (May 1997).

³ Sadly, Darger's room has since been destroyed (2000). Various parts of the architectural decor and furnishings have been kept in the hope of reconstructing the room at another location.

⁴ Despite the fact that Darger was twenty-one years older than his landlord, Nathan functioned in some ways as a kind and generous father to his poor and increasingly childlike tenant. During the sixteen years of their relationship he never raised Henry's rent, never interfered in his less than conventional lifestyle. On the rare occasion that Darger found himself in trouble, he would turn to "Mr. Leonard," as he called him, for help. Is it possible that, knowing Nathan as he did, Henry may have hoped that in leaving his life work behind, concealed in his room, Nathan would somehow discover and protect it?

⁵ Interview with David Berglund, February 20, 1994. I will return to this account of Darger's reaction in chapter 1.

⁶ This crucial detail concerning Darger's response was told to me by Michael Baruch, during an interview on May 18, 1994. Michael said that David Berglund told him this story on several occasions.

⁷ In his young manhood, soon after his return to Chicago, Henry became friends with William Schloeder. This seems to have been his one and only real friendship. It is very possible that in the early years of writing, Darger would have shared portions of *The Realms* with his friend, but since Schloeder is said to have been unable to write and perhaps read in English, he could not have read the volumes for himself. We will return to this very important friendship in later chapters.

⁸ I return to this unusual statement in chapter 1, p. 72.

⁹ This amazing incident is explored in later chapters; see p. 96.

¹⁰ The largest group of Darger paintings presently in a public museum in Europe is to be found in the Collection de l'Art Brut, in Lausanne, Switzerland, as a result of a generous gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner. See

John M. MacGregor, *Henry J. Darger: Dans les Royaumes de l'irréel*, Lausanne, 1996. A still larger collection of Darger's work has been given to the American Folk Art Museum, in New York, a generous gift to the Darger Archives of The Contemporary Center of that museum from Mrs. Kiyoko Lerner.

¹¹ The urge to make "art" experienced by many untrained amateurs, as well as their conventional notions of art as landscape, still-life, or portrait painting, whether of humans or horses (something to frame and hang on the wall), is precisely the aspect of their motivation which allows us to identify these artists as naive, self-taught, or Sunday painters, and to differentiate them from Outsiders.

¹² It is very unusual, though not unknown, to encounter true Outsider Art on toilet walls, since for the most part there is very little individuality in such drawings, which generally conform to a standardized tradition of representation.

¹³ Lewis Carroll's lifelong involvement with real little girls, and the various works of art which emerged from his obsession with the beauty of female children, will be explored in chapter 6 to provide a contrasting standpoint from which to view Darger's similar but ultimately entirely different preoccupations.

¹⁴ The little girls' male genitals are not always depicted. We will examine the reasons for this in chapter 10.

¹⁵ The fundamental basis of my friendly relationship with Henry is to be understood as a result of the fact that I obtained a copy of the missing photograph and replaced it in the room.

¹⁶ A recent exception to this statement is provided by Michael Bonesteel's book, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000.

¹⁷ Longer quotations from Darger's manuscripts are invariably displayed in the text so as to avoid confusion and to enable the reader to evaluate their significance for himself. In almost all cases the location in the writings from which a quotation comes is indicated exactly. However, in the course of over ten years of research I have occasionally neglected to record a page or volume number. This has not prevented me from using a quotation, but has made it impossible for me to be absolutely consistent in providing an exact reference.

¹⁸ The first use of the term "collage-drawing" to refer to Darger's large watercolor compositions occurs in my essay "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Princeton University Press, 1992.

¹⁹ As will become apparent, Darger regularly pauses to address his imaginary reader.

NOTES

Chapter 1

¹ Tyrone Guthrie, *A Life in the Theatre*, New York, 1959, pp. 10–11.

² *The History of My Life*, p. 14.

³ For a full discussion of the News Boys' Home and Henry's life there, see pp. 40–42.

⁴ *History*, p. 38.

⁵ For other references to the same event, see p. 55.

⁶ The institution survives as the Lincoln Developmental Center, 861 South State Street, Lincoln, Illinois. The identity of this physician, and the grounds for his diagnosis, and for Henry's institutionalization, will be discussed below, p. 45.

⁷ *The History of My Life* consists of binders, school notebooks, and journals, of various kinds and sizes. There are eight handwritten volumes, with consecutively numbered pages. Due to the extreme complexity of the state in which Henry's manuscripts were left, for a time it was believed that the life history consisted only of two volumes. Then, for a short period, it seemed that consecutive page numbering of additional volumes resulted in a 22-volume manuscript of 10,531 pages, with two volumes and some 846 pages missing. In December 1993, it was finally realized that *The History of My Life* consisted only of eight volumes and approximately 5,084 pages (Darger's page count). Despite its title, this handwritten text really contains two distinct works: a surprisingly accurate autobiography and, after p. 206, what Darger himself refers to as "a fictional story of a huge huge twister called 'Sweetie Pie.'" An extensive search for public and institutional records concerning Darger, with visits to all of the surviving institutions in which he lived and worked, has yielded sufficient information to allow us to confirm most of the factual material in *The History*.

⁸ An interesting parallel to Darger's *The History of My Life* is Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*, Chicago, 1966. First published in 1930, it is a detailed account of the life of Stanley, a delinquent boy, living in the Chicago of the 1920s. As with Darger's *History*, it is written by the subject, and describes his life in various Chicago institutions for delinquent boys. Although it takes place two decades later than Darger's story, much remained unchanged in Chicago and its institutions. Another example would be George Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody*, published in 1892, the year of Henry's birth, and republished in 1937 in London.

⁹ The title of this second enormous manuscript by Darger, the existence of which was only recognized in December 1993, is to a limited extent my invention. The title was arrived at using two different references to the novel occurring in two different places in Henry's

writings. Use of this title is necessitated, hopefully temporarily, by the fact that the title page of this approximately 8,000-page handwritten manuscript is missing. It is unmistakably a sequel to the first novel, set in the Chicago of Henry's boyhood.

¹⁰ For a more precise description of Henry's diagnosis, see Appendix A.

¹¹ In Darger's diary there is an entry for Wednesday, April 3, 1968, which reads, "Still writing Life History." This is the earliest indication that Henry was engaged in this task. When exactly he began the writing of his autobiography is not known more precisely.

¹² *History*, p. 80.

¹³ This fictional work is devoted to the description of a largely imaginary tornado which decimates certain invented cities in Illinois. He dates this event quite specifically to August 15, 1913, describing its impact on Chesterbrown, Zaneville, Johnstontown, and Chester-shire. See below pp. 434–436.

¹⁴ Birth certificate on file, at the Department of Vital Statistics, Cook County, State of Illinois. This effectively disposes of the published rumor that Henry was born in Brazil. The first line of *The History of My Life* is left strangely incomplete. "In the month of April on the 12, in the year of 1892, of what week day I never knew, as I was never told, nor did I seek the information." Henry then neglects to tell his reader what it was that occurred on the day in question – his birth! Efforts have been made to locate the family at this address in the Chicago directories, which go back to the 1850s, but without success. The house no longer exists. A year earlier, in 1891, his father, Henry Darger, a tailor, is listed in the Chicago Street Directory as living at "372 23d. Street." The date of Henry's death is established by his death certificate, also on file at the Department of Vital Statistics.

¹⁵ United States Census Records for 1900, information supplied by Henry Darger, Sr., himself.

¹⁶ Ibid. See also death certificate of Rosie Darger, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Department of Health, City of Chicago.

¹⁷ According to Henry Darger, Sr.'s death certificate, he had been living in Chicago for thirty-four years at the time of his death in 1908. Whether he came directly from Germany to Chicago in 1874 is not known with certainty.

¹⁸ According to Henry's birth certificate, he is his mother's third child. This would suggest either that she had two children in a previous marriage, or that she had had two illegitimate children prior to her marriage to Henry Darger, Sr. No marriage certificate for the couple has been located, and so it is not known for certain whether they were legally married. The fact that the person (Henry's father) who arranged for her burial is listed simply as "Henry" may suggest that they were not legally married.

¹⁹ "My father and two uncles were as they told me born in the city of Meldorf Germany": *History*, p. 29. Efforts made to trace the family back to the town of Meldorf have met with some success. The name is exceedingly rare. It is possible that Henry is a descendent of a journeyman-tailor Hans Heinrich Darger, the son of Peter Heinrich Darger from Barum near Luneburg. According to the parish records of Meldorf, this tailor Hans Darger married Anna Luise Charlotte Breslau in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church on May 2, 1830. It is not impossible, though still not proven, that the product of this marriage included three sons who immigrated to America, Henry senior (born 1840) and his two younger brothers, Augustine (born 1843) and Charles (born 1844). This would help to account for the fact that all three Darger brothers were tailors.

Interesting in the context of Henry's literary career is the fact that another Darger living in Meldorf founded a local newspaper, the *Meldorfer Zeitung*, in 1881 as well as a printing house, B. S. Darger Buchdruckerei. His name was Bertus Sinemus Darger. At his death in 1897 his son, Heinrich Darger, took over the firm, operating it from 1897 to 1923. It has not been possible as yet to establish the relationship between these two Darger families who lived in Meldorf. No families with that name have lived in the town for many years, and the name does not appear in later address books or telephone directories.

²⁰ *History*, p. 30. The birth and death dates for Henry's uncles August and Charles, as well as their occupations, were supplied by the Masonic Order of the State of Illinois, Apollo Lodge, Number 642, to which they both belonged. This would imply that they remained Protestants, whereas Henry senior may have converted to Catholicism, the faith in which his son was raised. It is possible that some or all three of the brothers spent some time in Brazil prior to coming to America. No proof of this exists, except that Henry occasionally used the name Dargarius, suggesting that this was the Brazilian spelling of his name. *History*, p. 1. No trace of the name Dargarius could be found in Meldorf, Germany. On another occasion, objecting to being physically punished, he wrote, "Yet because of my real descent of my nationality is much against such type of punishment, had we been in Brazil, he would have been killed for boxing my ears." *History*, p. 52.

²¹ *History*, p. 30.

²² *History*, p. 29.

²³ *The Realms*, vol. ten (part one), p.10–230 (458). The questioner is Jennie Turmer, the stranger, an American of Irish origin from Chicago.

²⁴ Death certificate of Rosie Darger.

²⁵ *History*, p. 1.

²⁶ Death certificate of Rosie Darger. Darger's mother died in the Cook County Hospital at eight a.m. She was thirty-five years old. Rosie was buried at Oak Woods

Cemetery on April 6, 1896, in a single grave, Section O, Division 2, Grave 441. Arrangements for the burial were made by an individual simply listed as "Henry," which may imply that no legal marriage existed.

²⁷ It isn't known whether the family's second child was also born at home, but a home birth and a careless midwife might best explain the mother's death from childbed fever. "Mortality records in Chicago reveal that during the period from 1856 to 1896, puerperal infection was given as the cause of death of 13 percent of all women dying between the ages of twenty and fifty years ... Most births took place under unsanitary conditions in small, unclean apartments in tenement areas." Thomas and Neville Bonner, *Medicine in Chicago*, Madison, Wisc., 1957, p. 29.

²⁸ The absence of a birth certificate in the Cook County Record Office for any child with the name of Darger probably implies that she was handed over to the authorities soon after birth, for adoption. In such cases no birth certificate in the name of Darger would have been filed. In the expert opinion of Mr. Michael Fish, Director of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, at the Office of the Cook County Clerk, the child was likely to have been adopted.

²⁹ *History*, p. 8.

³⁰ In connection with his admission into the St. Augustine Home for the Aged, he was asked his mother's name. He substituted that of his aunt Emma, Augustine's wife. It was, accordingly, Emma's name which appeared in the space reserved for his mother's name on Henry's death certificate.

³¹ If the mother gave birth at home, it is not unlikely that prior to his mother's confinement, Henry would have been taken to stay with friends or relatives, perhaps to the home of one of his paternal aunts.

³² *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 386. For another passage in *The Realms* where Darger deals with his father's pathological grief, see below p. 42.

³³ This reference to his sister's disappearing one month after his mother's death is important, in that it may imply he had at least passing experience of her, which remained present in his unconscious.

³⁴ The effect over a long period of time of his father's grief and depression would have been an enormous additional burden influencing the development of the young boy.

³⁵ *History*, pp. 1–3.

³⁶ Ibid. Though the house had two floors, it seems from Henry's description, that they lived only on one floor, in two adjoining rooms, a kitchen and bedroom. This house no longer exists. So far it has not been possible to locate photographs of the south side of the alley running between Adams and Monroe streets.

However, the Fire Insurance Atlases for the period still exist, and these provide a very precise indication of the location of the Darger house. It was a small, independent structure located in the yard behind 165 West Adams. (After 1910, when Chicago streets were renumbered, it became 754.) It was 24 feet high and included two rooms separated by a frame partition. In 1892 it was a frame building, but at some time before 1895 it was clad with brick. The plan I am using dates to 1891, updated to 1895, and therefore covers the period when Henry lived there with his father. In the Chicago Street Directories, Henry Darger, Sr., is listed at that address from 1896 until 1903, after which he disappears from the Directory.

³⁷ These comments are based on the memories of Sister Hortense Marie Ponthieux who worked in the neighborhood as a nun for much of the twentieth century.

³⁸ *History*, p. 3.

³⁹ Henry turned four just after his mother's death. It is not known how long he stayed with his father, but the evidence seems to suggest he went to live in the News Boys' Home at about the age of eight.

⁴⁰ *History*, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ *History*, p. 18. Among the books preserved in Darger's room were two primary readers, *Wheeler's Graded Readers: A First Reader*, Chicago, 1901, and *A Second Reader*, Chicago, 1903. No inscription identifies them as belonging to Darger. The dates of publication would seem to place them later in his childhood, when he was no longer living at home with his father. On the 1900 Census form, Darger senior indicated that he could read, write, and speak English.

⁴² *History*, p. 7. Also preserved in Henry's room were a number of children's books with dates just before and after the turn of the century. Since he went on collecting children's books for the rest of his life, it is impossible to know if some of them belonged to him in childhood.

⁴³ *History*, p. 7. This emphasis on paint boxes and other articles which he acquired himself may possibly indicate that Henry had begun to steal.

⁴⁴ *History*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For at least part of the time Darger lived in this house, there was no building on the opposite side of the alley, so that he could see through to West Monroe Street and the two large school buildings belonging to the English High and Manual Training Schools which stood there.

⁴⁷ Darger kept what he called "Weather Books" in which he recorded the weather and temperature each day, commenting on the errors made by the weatherman. Six of these books survive, covering the period 1958 to

December 31, 1967. There is a gap after volume one, which probably implies that one of the books is missing.

⁴⁸ *History*, p. 165.

⁴⁹ From my own life I can supply very early childhood memories connected with witnessing fires, characterized by extreme ambivalence: both the desire to go to fires, and feelings of overwhelmingly intense emotion, panic, which made it necessary to flee from burning buildings. For thoughts on the meaning of fire, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Boston, 1964.

⁵⁰ *History*, p. 5.

⁵¹ *History*, p. 12.

⁵² *History*, pp. 12-13. Unusual for Darger, he confesses, "I did not remember the year, day, or month of that fire," probably because it occurred when he was still quite young. Although it should be possible to find references in the Chicago papers to this fire, which burned for several days, and necessitated the temporary evacuation of Darger's neighborhood, I have not been able to locate any reference to it in the Chicago papers.

⁵³ *History*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁴ *History*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ *History*, pp. 15-18. Significantly, on the neighborhood plan published in the Fire Insurance Atlas, on a building two doors along the alley from Darger's home, there is a note saying, "Boxes stored here."

⁵⁶ *History*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁷ *History*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁸ *History*, p. 9a.

⁵⁹ It is not known whether Henry or his father attended St. Patrick's Church. No records exist suggesting that they did. Henry was baptized only at the age of eight. The priest in charge of St. Patrick's during the years of Henry's boyhood was the Rev. Thomas F. Galligan (active 1884-1911 at St. Patrick's).

⁶⁰ In 1876 a four-story brick school for girls had been erected. It was staffed by the "Daughters of Charity." It was located at 145 and 147 W. Adams, a few doors down from Henry's home. Does the fact that Henry was sent to a Catholic school imply that his father had converted to Catholicism, or was it simply more convenient? Henry was not baptized until considerably later, at about age eight. Little boys first enrolled in the girls' school, and then, after completing grade four, moved to the boys' school. Both schools are visible on the plan of the neighborhood. Nancy Sandleback, Assistant Archivist of the archdiocese of Chicago, helped my attempts to locate parish records relating to Henry's ties to St. Patrick's Church and its schools.

⁶¹ *History*, p. 3. The school for boys run by the Christian Brothers since 1861 was at 135 Desplaines, just around the corner from Henry's home. Founded in 1856, the four-story redbrick school, which had been erected in 1876, was called St. Patrick's Academy for Boys. Sadly the school records for the period during which Henry was enrolled in the schools run by St. Patrick's, are no longer preserved. The photograph, made in a classroom in the boys' school, dates to 1910, some ten years after Henry was a pupil there.

⁶² *History*, p. 19.

⁶³ *History*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ *History*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ *History*, p. 118. Henry claims that he was expelled from school on this occasion.

⁶⁶ *History*, p. 118.

⁶⁷ *History*, p. 120.

⁶⁸ *History*, pp. 30-31. The events described would seem to imply that Henry was removed from his home by social welfare authorities, probably acting on instructions from the Juvenile Court. I have not been able to determine the identity of the home or detention facility located at Morton Grove. I have attempted to obtain access to the Juvenile Court Records for this period without success. It seems likely that some record concerning this initial brush with social welfare and/or judicial authorities must have existed. I spoke with Leonard Hohlbein, who suggested that there are no Juvenile Court records dating back that far.

⁶⁹ *History*, pp. 36-7.

⁷⁰ *History*, pp. 78-9. Henry uses the term "molested" quite often, especially in connection with the tragic fate of little girls, but it doesn't seem to have possessed any explicitly sexual implications for him. A child who is sexually molested frequently lacks any suitable vocabulary to use in referring to what has happened.

⁷¹ Sophonisba Breckinridge, Ph.D., and Edith Abbott, Ph.D., *The Delinquent Child and the Home: A Study of the Delinquent Wards of the Juvenile Court of Chicago*, New York, 1912, p. 95.

⁷² Chapter 3 of *The Delinquent Child and the Home* is entitled "The Child of the Immigrant: The Problem of Adjustment." In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Chicago had more than 500,000 foreign-born inhabitants in a population of two million. Of 14,183 children who came into the Chicago Juvenile Court between July 1, 1899, when the court was established, and June 30, 1909, some 1,276 were boys who had lost their mothers. During that same ten-year interval, 2,011 boys coming from German immigrant families appeared in Juvenile Court. It is not impossible that Henry was one of them.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ *History*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ *History*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ "... they told me I was seven years old at the time of the one hundred days war with Spain." *History*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ "My Godmother had me baptized on the snowy afternoon, in St. Patrick's church on Desplaines and Adams street, Chicago": *History*, p. 74. Old St. Patrick's Church, dedicated in 1856, is one of the few buildings in Chicago that survived the great fire of 1871, and its records are therefore intact. The church still exists, at 718 West Adams Street. I was allowed to consult personally the old baptismal registers for several years before and after the approximate date of Henry's baptism, and was unable to locate any record of the event. Since several pages are missing from these records, it is still possible that Henry was baptized here.

At present the identity of the woman who functioned as his godmother isn't known. She was to play a significant role on several other occasions in his life.

⁷⁸ *History*, pp. 20-21. The home still exists at the same location, but is now known as the Mercy Home for Boys and Girls.

⁷⁹ *History*, p. 20. Located at Sheffield and Fullerton avenues, in the neighborhood in which Darger was to spend all of his adult life, this home for the old and physically infirm was operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor. Paradoxically, it was in the same home for seniors that Darger was to spend his final days some seventy-three years later. This institution survives, but no records were found for the period of Henry's father's stay there.

One of the interesting but unsolved problems concerns the failure of Henry senior's brothers to come to his aid at a number of crucial points: At the death of his wife, when they might have been expected to take in the infant child, who was instead given up for adoption. Could it be that he had alienated the family when he decided to marry a much younger woman at the age of fifty? And when Darger senior was unable to care for Henry, why did they not offer to take the young boy in? Could it be that he was already seen as too difficult to handle?

⁸⁰ Darger senior died in 1908 of cirrhosis of the liver, complicated by chronic nephritis (kidney disease). This might suggest, though absolutely not necessarily, that he was an alcoholic. If that was the case, it might explain his relative failure in life, the suspected poor relations with his brothers, and his inability to look after his son. See also note 164 below.

⁸¹ In writing about this change in his environment, Henry seems to imply that he went into the News Boys' Home because his father gave up the home at 165 W. Adams and went into the St. Augustine's Home for the Aged. This was not in fact true. His father continued to live at that address from 1896 until at least 1903. However, on June 7, 1900, he filled out the Census form for the 12th United States Census, in which all resi-

dents of each house are listed. He identified himself as a widower, but left blank the following questions: Number of years married, Mother of children, Number of children living. Thus it seems likely that Henry was no longer living with him at 165 Adams by 1900. In the City Directory for 1904, the father's name no longer appears at that address or any other, perhaps implying that he was now resident in St. Augustine's Home. According to his death certificate he entered the home five years before his death in 1908, that is in 1903.

⁸² This institution was much used by the newly created Juvenile Court of Chicago as a halfway house for dependent (non-delinquent) Catholic boys. The Director of the institution would be appointed as guardian, often with the consent of the parents. Henry could have been placed in the home, either by concerned church authorities, or by the Juvenile Court. Efforts have been made without success to locate the records of the court, and to contact the Cook County Department of Social Welfare, to see if such records survive from around 1900. See Breckinridge and Abbott, *The Delinquent Child and the Home*, p. 210.

⁸³ Also called "the Working Boys' Home," this Home for boys was at 363 W. Jackson Boulevard (after the renumbering of 1910, 1140 W. Jackson). The institution still exists under a different name, Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, in a newer building at the same address. Henry's description of the old building, which had been purchased for the Home in 1889, is very accurate. That building was replaced by a larger structure built for the purpose of housing a large number of boys in 1910, well after Henry's departure. Sadly, no record of Henry's stay in the Home survives. Father James Close, the present Director of the Home, and John Connelly, Assistant to the Superintendent, kindly allowed me access to all the surviving records of the Home.

⁸⁴ "A Brief History of the Mission," *The Waifs' Messenger*, vol. 1 (1901), p. 1, and *ibid.* (1905). In 1902, a second residence had been purchased on the west side of the Mission. In 1909-10 the original building in which Darger lived was replaced by a three-story redbrick structure on the same site. This new building was specially designed to serve the needs of the institution, and is still in use today.

⁸⁵ Father Dennis S. A. Mahony (died 1911) was, surprisingly, a product of West Point Military Academy, an institution which may have provided a model for his work at the Home. The present Director of the Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, Father Jim Close, confirmed the suspected link between Father Mahony and "Father Meany," the unofficial name by which he was known to the boys.

⁸⁶ "Father Mahony was given the able assistance of Father O'Hara, who ably seconded him in his endeavors." "Our Silver Jubilee 1887-1912," *The Waifs' Messenger*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1912), p. 19. These historical

details are useful in confirming the truth of Darger's memories of his childhood as described in *The History*. Despite the absence of any records relating to Darger's residence in the Home, the abundance of detailed information on the News Boys' Home provided in *The History* makes it possible to demonstrate conclusively that he lived in the institution around the turn of the century.

⁸⁷ "Our Silver Jubilee 1887-1912."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *History*, pp. 21-2.

⁹⁰ *History*, p. 28. Some of the boys in the News Boys' Home would have been placed there by the Juvenile Court, where a clear distinction was made between "dependent" and "delinquent" boys. Other dependent boys, those who were committed to an institution rather than released to the care of a guardian (such as the Director of the News Boys' Home), would have been sent to St. Mary's Training School for Boys at Feehenville, which was also a Catholic institution. More serious offenders were sent to the John Worthy School, or the St. Charles School for Boys, at St. Charles. Other boys were picked up on the street, or referred by clergy connected with the Catholic churches in the district.

⁹¹ *History*, p. 38.

⁹² *History*, p. 41. In the absence of records, it is not possible to determine the date of Henry's arrival, or the reasons for his admission. The date of his departure can be determined quite exactly, since he arrived at the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children on November 28, 1904.

⁹³ *History*, p. 40. It is a brisk five-minute walk from the Darger residence at 165 W. Adams to the Home. Since his father continued to live at that address until 1903, it should have been possible, despite his crippled condition, for him to see more of his son than seems to have been the case.

⁹⁴ *History*, pp. 40-41. Darger explains: "There were two priests in main charge, Fathers Meaney and O'Hara. Father Meaney was the main head or otherwise top administrator. At the time of his arrival there was a matron in charge of the boys, a Mrs. Brown. Later she was replaced by the formidable Mrs. Gannon, a figure worthy of Dickens. Darger also mentions, 'a sort of overseer, his name was Otto Zink.' If Henry was correct in thinking it would require a court order to remove him from the Home, this would probably imply that he was a ward of court, and that Father Mahoney had been appointed as his guardian. Having a child legally adopted by a responsible individual was one way of obtaining his release from a court-ordered guardianship.

⁹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-317 (2914), the final page of the volume. If the letter was in fact written seven years after Darger left St. Joseph's Hospital (1923), it would date to 1930. Assuming that he

was writing this fictional letter in the year referred to, volume twelve (unbound), the second to last book in *The Realms*, would have been completed in 1930.

⁹⁶ For Annie Aronburg and the missing photograph, see chapter 9. Darger seems to have believed that his sister was placed in an orphanage, and that is where he envisaged her, never considering the possibility that she might have been adopted by a family.

⁹⁷ *History*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ *History*, pp. 27-8.

⁹⁹ Mrs. Gannon (see note 94 above), or her son James, is identified with the person of King Gannon, the evil ruler of the country of Glandelinia, in *The Realms*. Darger also mentions two brothers in the Mercy Home, John and Jim Scanlon, and they too were to make significant appearances in his imaginary world.

¹⁰⁰ *History*, p. 25. "The Skinner School was on Jackson Boulevard, and Aberdeen street ... two blocks east of the home": *History*, p. 26. The photograph of the Skinner School was taken in 1903, when Henry was still attending the school. Larry Vischochil of the Chicago Historical Society helped me locate this photograph.

¹⁰¹ Mr. Nick Posegay, Records Custodian for the Chicago Board of Education, was kind enough to make a very detailed search for the records covering the period of Henry's stay at the Skinner School (which still exists at another location) but sadly was unable to find them.

¹⁰² *History*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰³ *History*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ *History*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁰⁵ *History*, pp. 33-4.

¹⁰⁶ *History*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ *History*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ *History*, p. 39. Because of the intensity of the reaction to this gesture, I believe it was perceived as masturbatory in character. The News Boys' Home, as an institution used to handling extremely difficult boys from the streets, should not have experienced any difficulty in reforming Henry. However, in a Catholic institution around 1900, openly masturbatory gestures would be completely unacceptable, and would be seen as cause for a diagnosis of feeble-mindedness. What the actual nature of this gesture was remains uncertain. It is possible that it was one of a group of repetitive symptoms reflective of a mild autistic condition. Leo Kanner describes one of the essential characteristics of childhood autism as "an obsessive insistence on sameness, most simply in the form of repetitive, stereotyped movements and noises." See his "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact," *Nervous Child*, vol. 2 (1943), pp. 217-50. See also Oliver Sacks, "An Anthropologist on Mars," *New Yorker*, 1994. For a discussion of the diagnostic questions raised by Darger's condition both in childhood and in adult life, see Appendix A.

¹⁰⁹ The admission records of the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children have been preserved. They are to be found in the Illinois State Archives, in Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹⁰ In 1911 Justice Merritt W. Pinckney of the Juvenile Court of Chicago, when asked about the Working Boys' Home, stated, "I always feel very confident when a child is placed with them that that child will be properly handled." Breckinridge and Abbott, *The Delinquent Child*, p. 210.

¹¹¹ The identification of the physician who saw Henry and filled out the Application for Admission forms for the Illinois Asylum is based on the fact that he signed the form as physician. The form was also signed by Henry's father. The application, registered as number 5007, is dated November 16, 1904.

¹¹² *History*, pp. 41-2.

¹¹³ Terminology used in court records to refer to the mental state of application children include references to boys who were "obviously peculiar," or "queer," or "weak in the head," or "feeble-minded." As an adjunct to the Juvenile Court of Chicago, a Juvenile Psychopathic Institute was established with private funds in 1908, slightly too late for Henry to have undergone psychological assessment there. "This society carries on the work of examining children who there is reason to believe are defective or abnormal, and in general places itself at the service of the court." Breckinridge and Abbott, *The Delinquent Child*, p. 5. At its head was "Dr. William J. Healy, a well known physician and neurologist, a man especially fitted to look into the psychology of the child."

¹¹⁴ Otto L. Schmidt was born in Chicago, March 21, 1863. He graduated from Chicago Medical College (now Northwestern University Medical School) in 1883. He worked as an attending physician at Grant and Alexian Brothers hospitals, both institutions at which Henry was also to work in later life. Is it possible they overlapped at either of these institutions? He was forty-one years old when he saw Henry as a patient in 1904. His biography contains no hint of an interest in psychology or psychiatry. He was unusual only in terms of his serious interest in history and in the history of medicine. His residence was at 1547 Dearborn Parkway, Chicago.

¹¹⁵ *History*, pp. 42-3. Henry states: "To me it is a sad remembrance now to go back to the home. I had been there I believe, for about seven years." This figure is incorrect. Henry was admitted to the asylum on November 28, 1904, and officially discharged on September 17, 1910. He had escaped, however, in July 1909. The decision to send Henry to a non-Catholic institution was very peculiar and demands explanation. Only very extreme circumstances would have prompted the Directors of the News Boys' Home to yield a Catholic child to the care of a non-Catholic institution.

On October 25, 1993 I too rode the train, which is now known as "the Loop," to the town of Lincoln, Illinois, to visit the Lincoln Developmental Center. I felt something of the same trepidation Henry must have felt, as he headed for an unknown town and a strange new home.

¹¹⁶ The institution described by Henry invariably as "the asylum" was, in fact, the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, in Lincoln, Illinois. The institution still exists, though it has been renamed the Lincoln Developmental Center. Darger's institution number, assigned to him at the time of his admission, was 5007. Despite the energetic efforts of Mrs. Jessie Shull, former Archivist of the Center, no surviving records related to Darger were found.

¹¹⁷ In the Asylum Day Books there is an entry for July 23, 1909. "Word was received from the farm that Ernst Nordstrom and Henry Darger are missing." On July 29, Ernst Nordstrom was returned from Joliet. No mention occurs of Henry Darger's being returned to the institution. This was therefore Henry's final and successful escape attempt.

¹¹⁸ Given the rudimentary state of development of diagnostic evaluation of childhood disturbances in the late nineteenth century, it is of significance that this institution was called into being in order to free the School for the Deaf and Dumb at Jacksonville of the burden of children whose inability to speak and to understand was the result not of deafness, but of mental retardation. At the same time, it appeared necessary to exclude children from the insane asylum for adults which was also located at Jacksonville. Mental illness was little recognized in children, with the majority of disturbed children of whatever kind simply identified as feeble-minded. The hospital admission records do include many cases of epilepsy, as well as occasional diagnoses of dementia praecox, or schizophrenia.

¹¹⁹ Dr. C. T. Wilbur, "The Illinois Asylum for Feeble Minded Children," in Anon., *History of Logan County, Illinois*, Chicago, 1878, p. 238. Clearly, the provision "incapable of being educated in an ordinary school" permitted Darger's admission, despite the fact that he was not feeble-minded.

¹²⁰ Lawrence B. Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, Chicago, 1911, vol. 1, p. 456.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 457. Sadly, this school building and chapel has been torn down. The tunnel which connected it to the Main Building is now blocked off, though it is possible to walk along it for a considerable way from the entrance in the Main Building.

¹²² "Lincoln Developmental Center," in *History of Logan County* 1982, Dallas, 1982, p. 83. I would also like to thank Mr. Russell Allen, who worked at the Lincoln Developmental Center for many years, and who provided me with some insight into the nature of this institution.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 83. See also "Proposed Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, near Lincoln, Ill.," *Chicago Tribune*, Friday, September 1, 1899.

¹²⁴ Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, vol. 1, p. 452. In the year of Darger's departure the institution changed its name again to the Lincoln State School and Colony (June 1909). In the years that followed, the institution grew to include truly enormous numbers of patients, culminating by 1953 with a population of over 5,000. With the trend in the 1970s to place handicapped patients in the community, the population dropped rapidly, and today the Lincoln Developmental Center houses around 450 children and adults.

¹²⁵ "Consolidated Pay Roll of the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children ... for the two years ending June 30, 1908." In *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children* (Lincoln, July 1, 1908). This payroll list is of unique importance in that it lists all of the employees working at the asylum, by name and occupation, during the years Darger lived there. On the basis of this list it has been possible to identify several individuals mentioned by Darger in *The History*. In that the payroll list also includes the names of 129 male and female inmates who were employed on a part-time basis by the institution, it is possible to identify some of the patients Henry lived with. Sadly, he was not so employed, and so his name was not included on the list.

¹²⁶ *History*, p. 56. In October 1906 Darger weighed 87 pounds. By May 1907, when he was fifteen, his weight had increased to 95 pounds.

¹²⁷ *History*, p. 62.

¹²⁸ Henry's estimate is quite accurate. In 1905 shortly after his arrival, the number of inmates is listed as 1,439.

¹²⁹ *History*, pp. 49-50 and 74. The building in which Henry lived was still standing when I visited, but only just. It had been abandoned for many years, and was being allowed to fall down. I was fortunate in being taken on a tour from the cellar to the attics, including a visit to the tunnel which once connected the residence to the school just across the street. The fire escape tubes described by Darger still function on a number of the buildings.

Given the date of Darger's arrival at the Lincoln Asylum, he could have known two superintendents of the institution. In 1901, Dr. Samuel H. Mclean had been appointed Director. He died there on March 18, 1903. He was succeeded by Dr. Charles B. Taylor, in March 1903, who would have been in charge when Henry arrived at the hospital. Later Dr. Harry G. Hardt assumed the duties of superintendent in January of 1907. Dr. C. B. Caldwell was never, in fact, a director of the institution, but functioned as physician assistant to Dr. Hardt. He appears to have come to work in the asylum in 1907. That Darger remembered him would suggest that he

served as physician to the boys' ward in the Main Building. In that he is listed as a "resident officer" he probably lived in the staff quarters in the rear wing of the Main Building.

¹³⁰ *History*, p. 44.

¹³¹ *History*, p. 51.

¹³² Wilbur, "The Illinois Asylum for Feeble Minded Children," p. 238.

¹³³ Anon., "Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children," in *History of Logan County, Illinois*, Chicago, 1886, p. 435.

¹³⁴ See "Consolidated Pay Roll of the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children," p. 53, where Miss Bertha Duff is listed at the head of a list of twenty-eight teachers. No principal is identified.

¹³⁵ *History of Logan County, Illinois*, 1886, pp. 458-9.

¹³⁶ In the Report of the Special Investigating Committee of the Illinois State Legislature reference is made to "clay modeling, painting and art work." "What teachers, if any, have you for that? Miss Hatch is a teacher of that. She is a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute ... I think she has been at the institution about five months."

¹³⁷ Report of the Special Investigating Committee. p. 25. "We have also purchased a number of books for the circulating library, picture books and story books for the children."

¹³⁸ Shaw, *The Jack Roller*. Although Stanley's account of life in Chicago boys' homes takes place two decades later than Darger's story, much remained unchanged in Chicago and its institutions.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of this process occurring in childhood, see Robert Silvey and Stephen Mackeith, "The Paracosm: A Special Form of Fantasy," in Delmont C. Morrison, ed., *Organizing Early Experience: Imagination and Cognition in Childhood*, Amityville, N.Y., 1988.

¹⁴¹ *History*, pp. 51-2 and 73-4. "Entertainment for the children has not been neglected. Concerts are given in the chapel and also at the cottages where the children of lower mentality are kept. Dances are given each week, interspersed now and then with an entertainment of some kind." Stringer, *History of Logan County*, pp. 458-9. Curiously, no mention of religion appears in any account of the asylum. Though a minister appears on the payroll list, "W. N. Wychoff," he is only listed as present on two days in 1907.

¹⁴² He does mention a "Mr. Bandico." "The assistant superior was an Italian by the name of Mr. Bandico. He was very severe too and somewhat harsh too, but never bothered me. He thought otherwise that my behavior was marvelous and liked me well." Mr. William Bandeko is listed on the payroll list as a "Head Attendant," presumably in the boys' ward of the Main Building. Darger also refers in passing to a Mr. West, presumably C. H. West, a male attendant.

¹⁴³ *History*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁴ *History*, p. 52. Henry Aurand does not appear on the payroll lists for 1907-8, and may have left by that time.

¹⁴⁵ See State of Illinois, Special Investigating Committee, appointed by Hon. Edward D. Shurtleff, Speaker, in accordance with House Resolution No. 78, January 14, 1908.

¹⁴⁶ While patients were released to their parents quite regularly, both for holidays or permanently, the death of Henry's father would have precluded all possibility of his release.

¹⁴⁷ *History*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁸ *History*, pp. 44-5.

¹⁴⁹ *History*, p. 50. Like many of the inmates of the Lincoln Asylum, Donald Aurand died there, of pulmonary tuberculosis, on January 14, 1910, a few months after Henry's escape.

¹⁵⁰ *History*, p. 53. It was the custom at the asylum to photograph the children shortly after their arrival. The Illinois State Archives possesses a photograph file covering the years 1880-1941, which contains 986 pictures of inmates. Sadly, no photograph exists for case 5007, Henry Darger.

¹⁵¹ *History*, pp. 55-6. Thomas O'Neill was an inmate of the asylum, and he was indeed working for the administration in some capacity, since his name appears on the payroll list in the years 1907-8. This is the only patient mentioned by Darger who also appears on the payroll list of 129 inmates who were working at the asylum, and whose existence there can therefore be verified.

¹⁵² *History*, p. 54.

¹⁵³ Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, p. 457.

¹⁵⁴ The Asylum Day Books record the exact day on which Henry moved out to the State Farm each year, and the day of his return. "June 8, 1908, The following were transferred this morning from N.W. to the farm to work in the garden. Henry Dodger." (Henry was often called Dodger in the asylum records.) "May 3, 1909, The following will be transferred from N.W. to the farm, Henry Darger."

¹⁵⁵ *History*, p. 56.

¹⁵⁶ *History*, pp. 56-7.

¹⁵⁷ *History*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁸ *History*, p. 61. Mr. Allenberger was, in fact, an "assistant farmer" by name, Alois Ilmberger. Darger mentions that he had a wife and little girl, an important parallel with his own family background. A Mrs. A. Ilmberger also appears on the payroll list as a domestic worker at the asylum. "A magnificent two story farm residence houses the inmates who are engaged in work on the farm." Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, p. 457.

¹⁵⁹ See the account in "Ravaged in Deer Creek but Missed Lincoln," *Lincoln Courier*, Monday, April 13, 1903, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, vol. 1, p. 40.

¹⁶¹ *History*, pp. 76–8. I attempted to locate a reference to this storm in the *Lincoln Courier*, but was not successful.

¹⁶² Report of the Special Investigating Committee. "Is it the province of this institution to hold inmates that way, continuously, simply because they were sent?" Answer from Dr. Hardt: "We keep them as long as we can, for they haven't any place to go to. We haven't any place to turn them over to." "They are simply kept there on account of their labor then, apparently? That is you work them if you can?" "Well, we keep them, we make a home for them as long as we can."

¹⁶³ *History*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁴ The date of death of Henry Joseph Darger, Sr., is established by his death certificate, on file at the Bureau of Vital Statistics, City of Chicago. He died at the home for the aged run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, on March 1, 1908 at six p.m. He had been resident in this home for five years. His age at death is listed as sixty-nine, and the certificate provides the additional information that he had been resident in Chicago for thirty-four years.

The cause of death is listed as cirrhosis of the liver – ascites, complicated by chronic nephritis. While cirrhosis of the liver can be caused by chronic alcoholism combined with a poor diet, there are many other possible diseases of the liver which may also result in cirrhosis. The term "ascites" refers to a swelling of the abdomen and legs due to the build-up of fluid. I would like to thank my friend, the late Dr. Peter Ostwald of San Francisco, for his thoughtful analysis of the implications of the cause of death of Darger senior.

Henry's father was buried at Mount Carmel cemetery, March 3, 1908. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Bill Schoen of Chicago, through whose persistent efforts I finally obtained a copy of the death certificate, and at last learned the date of Darger's father's death.

¹⁶⁵ *History*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁶ *History*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁷ *History*, pp. 61–2.

¹⁶⁸ Day Book, entry for May 19, 1909. "At the farm Henry Dodger [sic], Paul Pettit, and Theo Lindquist have been found missing, yesterday afternoon, and as yet have no clue as to their whereabouts." This is followed by an entry for June 23, 1909: "Mrs. Anna Statton, the Cook County Agent's nurse. I received from Mrs. Statton, Henry Dodger an escaped case." On July 23, 1909, Henry ran away again. His memory of the dates of his three escape attempts don't conform exactly with the

asylum records, not surprisingly in that he was writing about them from memory some sixty years later.

¹⁶⁹ *History*, pp. 62–3. Darger tells us that after being picked up by the police in Chicago, he was taken to yet another institution, "the poor house at Dunning Town," where he was kept for a month before being returned to the asylum at Lincoln.

¹⁷⁰ *History*, pp. 74–5.

¹⁷¹ *History*, p. 75. It is not clear whether Henry's belief that they would not take him back is correct, but he was officially discharged on September 17, 1910. Was he aware of this fact, or always in doubt as to whether he might be sent back?

¹⁷² *History*, p. 65.

¹⁷³ *History*, p. 63. In the *Annual Report of the Lincoln Asylum for the year 1910*, we are told that six inmates from Cook County escaped during the period 1909–10 covered by the report. Henry Darger would have been one of the six. Asylum Day Book, entry for July 23, 1909. "Word was received from the farm that Ernst Nordstrom and Henry Darger are missing." While Nordstrom is returned on July 29, 1909, there is no further mention of Henry, whose escape had apparently been successful.

¹⁷⁴ The original letter of reference survived in Darger's room.

¹⁷⁵ Founded in 1868, the hospital opened at the location familiar to Darger, 2100 Burling Street, in May 1872. The hospital still exists, at a new location, and an effort was made to locate Darger's work records for the two periods during which he worked at the hospital, 1909–22, and 1928–47. No employment records survive concerning Darger's period of employment.

¹⁷⁶ This residence for unmarried workers was located at 740 Garfield (now Dickens) Avenue.

¹⁷⁷ In a letter of reference written for Darger, and quoted below, it states he left St. Joseph's in 1922. Elsewhere he says he worked there until 1923.

¹⁷⁸ There is considerable confusion in *The History* concerning the dates of Darger's employment at Grant Hospital. He began working there in 1922 (or 1923), and left the hospital according to his own statement 1946. However, this is contradicted by many other statements in *The History*, and by a letter of reference dated January 23, 1928, which states that he worked at Grant Hospital for a period of about five years.

¹⁷⁹ *History*, pp. 69–70.

¹⁸⁰ *History*, pp. 71–2.

¹⁸¹ It is unlikely that Darger earned very much, beyond room and board, during this first period of employment at St. Joseph's Hospital. Curiously, one of his causes of dissatisfaction with God was the failure of a bank in 1913. "Graham's Bank went to smash. Great sum of saving lost. Losses irreparable, inexcusable." Was there such a bank failure in 1913? Is it possible that Darger, or some of his friends, lost money?

¹⁸² *History*, p. 85.

¹⁸³ *History*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁴ *History*, p. 83.

¹⁸⁵ *History*, p. 68.

¹⁸⁶ *History*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁷ *History*, p. 84.

¹⁸⁸ *History*, pp. 81–2.

¹⁸⁹ *History*, p. 96.

¹⁹⁰ *History*, pp. 71–2.

¹⁹¹ *History*, p. 86.

¹⁹² *History*, p. 158.

¹⁹³ *History*, p. 173.

¹⁹⁴ Darger's honorable discharge papers, dated December 28, 1917, survived in his room. I would like to thank Barbara Glenn for her attempts to locate Darger's military records.

¹⁹⁵ *History*, pp. 170 and 172.

¹⁹⁶ *History*, p. 172.

¹⁹⁷ *History*, p. 169.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ A postcard addressed to Thom. M. Phelan at St. Joseph's Hospital, and dated May 14, 1912, probably testifies to his objective existence. In 1913, April 17, Henry filled out a church form, asking that the following people be remembered with prayers: "Henry Darger, Father, mother, Phelan." At this time Phelan was alive and well, but the fact that Henry lists his name right after that of his parents suggests his emotional importance to Henry.

²⁰⁰ It is not known when Darger moved out of the workmen's house and found a room of his own in a boarding house at 1035 Webster Avenue. The census records for the 1920 Census list Henry Darger as living at St. Joseph's Hospital, Garfield Avenue and Burling. He is said to be aged twenty-eight. A letter bearing the 1035 Webster Avenue address and dated October 10, 1921, proves that he had left the hospital residence sometime before he left his job at the hospital.

²⁰¹ *History*, pp. 167–8.

²⁰² "Prediction Cause of Demand for Petition, March 11, 1911." Tan Notebook in Darger's room, his pp. 27–9. This obviously implies that the writing of *In the Realms of the Unreal* began as early as 1910, but that the earliest manuscripts were lost.

²⁰³ Tan Notebook in Darger's room, "Predictions and Threats," dated August 1912. Darger's p. 3.

²⁰⁴ "Predictions and Threats," opposite Darger's p. 3.

²⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 303. "Predictions and Threats," May 15, 1913, gives September 1910 as the date for the loss of the manuscript.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 24, p. 303. See also Tan Notebook, p. 47: "On account of the loss of the manuscript in September, 1910, it is found impossible to cause the capture of Calvernia by sea. the accounts of this wonderful feat was in that manuscript alone and only the return of the manuscript can cause this wonderful adventure to occur ... Its loss shall be avenged to the uttermost limit."

²⁰⁷ Actually a group of pictures seems to have been lost, of which this picture of Annie Aronburg was by far the most important. Darger associated this loss with Phelan as well.

²⁰⁸ "Predictions and Threats," Tan Notebook, his p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Michael Bonesteel is the Chicago scholar who originally identified this picture from the *Chicago Daily News*, Tuesday, May 9, 1911, with that of the fictional character Annie Aronburg, who Darger insists was also murdered. See chapter 8 for a full discussion.

²¹⁰ I attempted to examine Chicago police files on this presumably unsolved murder, but was told that "The Chicago Police Dept has no records of this case." Freedom of information inquiry, request number 94–101. The possibility that Darger committed the 1911 murder should not be dismissed without examination. He would have been nineteen years old. In *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2256, he says he was present at the murder of Annie Aronburg, but that the murderer was General Phelan. See chapter 8.

²¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," March 1, 1913.

²¹² "Prediction May 1912," Tan Notebook, Darger's p. 19.

²¹³ "Prediction March 1, 1916," Tan Notebook, Darger's p. 21. The term "mimic chapel" is not in common usage in the Catholic church.

²¹⁴ Quoted from a list of questions concerning his wish to adopt a little girl, dated 1929.

²¹⁵ *History*, pp. 85–6.

²¹⁶ *History*, p. 87.

²¹⁷ Letter of reference preserved in Darger's room.

²¹⁸ *History*, p. 128. Grant Hospital was founded in 1883. It was supported by Americans of German birth or extraction. It moved to the site familiar to Darger, at 551 Grant Place, in 1887. The buildings in which he worked were erected in 1913. Was Darger's German ancestry and name a factor in his obtaining employment at this hospital?

²¹⁹ *History*, p. 100. Darger had moved to this rooming house some time in 1920 or 1921. He was to continue living there until 1932. The house still exists. It was in this house that most of *The Realms* was written.

²²⁰ Located at 1010 Webster, and operated by the Vincentian Fathers, the church still exists. I have not been able to locate any of the older priests who might have known Henry.

- ²²¹ *History*, pp. 100–101.
- ²²² *History*, p. 101.
- ²²³ These presents (handkerchiefs, ties, etc.) remained in their boxes in Henry's room, seemingly unused.
- ²²⁴ *History*, p. 103.
- ²²⁵ *History*, pp. 174–5.
- ²²⁶ *History*, pp. 123–4. January 6 and 7 did in fact fall on a Sunday and Monday in 1918.
- ²²⁷ *History*, p. 129.
- ²²⁸ *History*, p. 174.
- ²²⁹ *History*, pp. 89–90.
- ²³⁰ *History*, pp. 187–8. Elsewhere he describes this blizzard of March 26 and 27, 1930, as occurring on Saturday and Sunday. However, March 26 and 27, 1930, fell on a Wednesday and Thursday. Apparently, Darger's memory was not faultless. The storm of March 25–26, 1930, established a record for snowfalls in that city: 19.2 inches of snow fell in a 48-hour period.
- ²³¹ *History*, p. 189. Darger loved the newspaper comic series "Ripley's Believe It or Not," and collected many examples of it. Darger is quite correct in his remembrance of heat waves in the 1930s. "The outstanding heat terms came in the summers of 1930, 1934, and 1936. Records for absolute maximums set in 1930 were exceeded in 1934, and again topped in 1936." David M. Ludlum, *The American Weather Book*, Boston, 1982.
- ²³² These volumes, a total of six of which survived in Darger's room, contain detailed information about the weather, from Wednesday, January 1, 1958, to Sunday, December 31, 1967. Between December 27, 1960, and May 31, 1962, the record breaks off. It is probable that at least one volume is missing at this point.
- ²³³ *The Realms*, vol. one. The picture referred to is probably that preserved in Henry's room (1.20, 1.21).
- ²³⁴ *Ibid*.
- ²³⁵ The Schloeder family, including William, moved to the suburbs of Chicago in the mid-1940s. It is likely that Henry saw much less of him after that date.
- ²³⁶ *History*, p. 122. Henry invariably misspelled his friend's name, adding an "h" to Whilliam, and varying the spelling of Schloeder.
- ²³⁷ The large picture of the two young men was found in Henry's room. For years there was no way to identify who the sitters were. However, along with the large picture, the photographer supplied a number of postcard-size prints. On the back of one of these, Henry typed the names William Schloeder and Henry Darger. Two slightly different versions of this picture survived as postcards. Did William own the other large photograph?
- ²³⁸ *History*, p. 123. Using the Chicago Directory it has been possible to reconstruct some of the Schloeder family history. William Schloeder's father, Michael, died in 1911 or 1912, and so Henry met William around 1910 or 1911. The mother's name was Susan. There were two sisters, Catherine and Elizabeth, who Henry knew. The family lived at 634 Garfield Avenue, close to the men's residence of St. Joseph's Hospital. The house no longer exists. The family moved to the suburbs in the mid-1940s.
- ²³⁹ Letter of condolence written to Catherine Schloeder on the death of her brother.
- ²⁴⁰ During all of the years when they were intimate, Schloeder is listed in the Chicago Directories as a laborer. His sisters worked in banks. A copy of a letter of reference written by Darger on behalf of his friend still existed in Henry's room.
- ²⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. one.
- ²⁴² Henry dates this event to October 31 and November 1, 1923, "when I was employed for my third year at Grant, I believe, 1923." He remembers that it occurred on Halloween and on a Friday night, continuing on Saturday, which was All Saints' Day. I believe he confused the year, since in 1923 October 31 fell on a Wednesday. The fire probably occurred on Friday, October 31, 1924. I have checked the *Chicago Daily News* for October 31, and November 1 and 2, 1924, for an account of this event, without success. Could the date be wrong? No such fire is described in the *Chicago Tribune* for those dates, though there is a note about a fire caused by a student bonfire in Evanston which almost led to a major conflagration. Could Darger be inventing here?
- ²⁴³ *History*, p. 109. The location was very close to Henry's home.
- ²⁴⁴ It was also the one in which he would die himself, forty-seven years later.
- ²⁴⁵ *History*, pp. 109–10.
- ²⁴⁶ *History*, pp. 114–15.
- ²⁴⁷ *History*, p. 179. Henry's account of this explosion fills nine pages of his autobiography. While exaggerated it is based on fact. This was a major Chicago event, and made the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, Thursday, January 30, 1930 ("13 Hurt by North Side Bomb"), and illustrated with numerous photographs.
- ²⁴⁸ *History*, p. 183. The preoccupation with the Black Hand was not restricted to Henry. See "Origin of 'Black Hand,'" *Daily News*, Monday, April 10, 1911, p. 5.
- ²⁴⁹ The constitution and laws of the Gemini are spelled out in detail in volume thirteen, pp. 3048 ff. Members of the club are listed as Vynne Marshall, Aldrich Bond, Henry Rich Littleton, Butler Noble Martindale, Simeon Binckney Woodring, Henry Walker Yeaman, Gerard Chambers, Johnstonia Fox, and Henry Joseph Darger.
- ²⁵⁰ In *The Realms* we are told that there were thirty members including president Darger. Nothing is known about Thomas A. Newsome, but the name occurs once more as a signature to an incredibly obscure handwritten letter, preserved in Darger's room. This document seems to preserve a number of beliefs and secrets of the Gemini. There are repeated references to a "Supreme Person," who is identified as Head of the Gemini. There are also puzzling references to "our beloved Rodney Graves." Most surprising is the fact that the document refers to Lincoln, Illinois, and "your Lincoln friends," perhaps indicating that the society known as the Gemini originated among the boys at the Lincoln Asylum. It refers to events occurring in 1909, and, in particular, to the period in June–August of that year, when Darger made his escape.
- "The first three months of the first year of your absence had been spent as a tramp ... Within three months after ye had gone to farm work, ye had placed your feet on Hospital floors." After a number of obscure instructions, the recipient of the letter, obviously Darger, is told, "Ye must keep inviolably secret these instructions and all instructions to follow from anyone not a Gemini." Neither the handwriting on the letter nor the signature was written by Darger. A second date appears on the letter, August 6, 1916, when the recipient was to appear at the office of Thomas Wentworth, in Evanston, Illinois, to pick up a sealed "envelope bearing the name of Rodney Graves." Given our present knowledge of Darger's early life, most of the contents of this mysterious letter remain completely impenetrable. I reproduce so much of its content here in the hope that someone may be able to provide insight into its meaning. Its very existence, and the fact that it was written by someone other than Darger, would indicate that the organization known as the Gemini was not merely a figment of Darger's imagination.
- ²⁵¹ It is possible that this barn in Chicago, which probably existed, can be equated with Snyder's Barn, which appears, variously spelled, from time to time in *The Realms*.
- ²⁵² *The Realms*, vol. one. "Predictions and Threats," dated August 11, 1916. Tan Notebook preserved in Darger's room. Page not numbered.
- ²⁵³ *History*, pp. 125–6.
- ²⁵⁴ An exception to this was represented by rare visits from priests at St. Vincent's Church. Two neighbors befriended him in later days: see pp. 78, 84.
- ²⁵⁵ *History*, pp. 90–94. Oddly, no Sunday falls on June 2 during the period when Henry was working at Grant Hospital, which we presently believe to have been 1922–28.
- ²⁵⁶ *History*, p. 93.
- ²⁵⁷ In the Chicago City Directory for 1928–29, Henry is listed as an employee of St. Joseph's Hospital, living at 1035 Webster Avenue.
- ²⁵⁸ *History*, pp. 96 and 98.
- ²⁵⁹ A letter from Emil and Minna Anschutz, dated September 10, 1932, expressed their pleasure in hearing that Henry liked his new home. A photograph of them was also preserved in his room.
- ²⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion of this masterpiece, and the basis for dating it, see chapter 3, pp. 139–145. In that Darger began work in 1939, on a new handwritten sequel to *The Realms*, which, in the absence of a title page, I have titled *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, it seems almost certain that he had completed work on *The Realms* by that date.
- ²⁶¹ This very odd document, "Found on Sidewalk," exists in two typewritten versions in Darger's room. One is dated 1929, the other 1930. Consisting of a series of questions directed, it would seem, to the ecclesiastical authorities in charge of adoption, or possibly to the priests of St. Vincent's Church, it raised the issue of why Darger's sincere prayers concerning the adoption of a child have not been answered. The questions betray the agonizing turmoil of this lonely man. This material will be discussed in detail in chapter 9.
- ²⁶² In the Tan Notebook we read, "Christians will be saved now only if God permits me to gain the means of owning property so that I can adopt children without suffering them the dangers of unsupport." This note is dated August 11, 1916.
- ²⁶³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-174.
- ²⁶⁴ *Ibid*. It is probable that all the names mentioned here are those of co-workers of Darger in his early years at St. Joseph's Hospital.
- ²⁶⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one.
- ²⁶⁶ Years later, he developed a sincere fondness for the Lerner's dog Yuki, which always greeted Darger with affection. He would occasionally buy meat for Yuki. He expressed a wish to adopt a dog of his own, but on inquiring realized it would cost him too much to feed another stomach. Conversation with Kiyoko Lerner.
- ²⁶⁷ *History*, pp. 103–4. Prior to being fired, Darger had been on holiday for three weeks, and so had missed the arrival of this new supervisor.
- ²⁶⁸ The Alexian Brothers order is devoted to the care of the sick and the founding of hospitals. It traces its involvement in Chicago back to 1865. The building Henry worked in was erected in 1898.
- ²⁶⁹ *History*, pp. 104–5 and 133.
- ²⁷⁰ *History*, pp. 133–5.
- ²⁷¹ *History*, p. 141.
- ²⁷² Darger's pay stubs survived in his room. In 1956 his earnings before taxes were \$2,399.53. Three years later he earned \$2,663.17.

²⁷³ The precise nature of this condition is unknown, and it is therefore impossible to know if it was related to the serious problems which crippled his father.

²⁷⁴ Michael Bonesteel has noticed that some of Darger's recording of temperature readings in the "Weather Books" were made in the early hours (e.g. three a.m.), further proof that at least in his later years he was often awake and possibly at work. See Michael Bonesteel, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000, p. 32.

²⁷⁵ *History*, pp. 105 and 148–50.

²⁷⁶ *History*, pp. 156–8.

²⁷⁷ *History*, pp. 155, 159–60, and 166.

²⁷⁸ *History*, p. 196.

²⁷⁹ *History*, pp. 195–6.

²⁸⁰ *History*, p. 195.

²⁸¹ *History*, p. 121.

²⁸² Interview with Amy Lerner, November 1993. This incident occurred around 1960, while Darger was still working at Alexian Brothers. The cuckoo clock went in for repairs, and was never recovered.

²⁸³ *History*, p. 198.

²⁸⁴ *History*, pp. 139–41.

²⁸⁵ *History*, pp. 161–2 and 150–51.

²⁸⁶ *History*, p. 163. It is possible that this unexpected self-identification as artist was the result of a chance comment by Kiyoko Lerner, Nathan's wife. Called to Henry's room to change a lightbulb, she chanced to see part of a painting on the table. Not particularly excited by this discovery, she nevertheless commented, "Henry, you are a good artist." This casual statement may have influenced Henry's perception of himself as having a new and surprising identity. Kiyoko admits that she was only being polite.

²⁸⁷ This table was refinished and transferred to the Lerner's home after Henry's death. Many unforgettable discussions about Darger and his life have been conducted around it.

²⁸⁸ The picture is now in the collection of Anthony Petullo, Milwaukee. See *Driven to Create: The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art*, Milwaukee Art Museum, 1993, pp. 34–5. This collage-drawing is also unique in that Darger refers on the label to the picture as "Scenes in this engraving," perhaps an indication that, like Adolf Wolflfi, he thought of the possibility of reproducing his pictures, along with his writings, in large numbers of illustrated copies.

²⁸⁹ These detailed records concerning amounts of time devoted to specific pictures are dated 1954–65, and were found on a series of five loose sheets preserved in the room.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ These five sheets don't appear to have been taken from one of the diaries or journals, and no further pages of this kind have been found with similar work records preserved on them.

²⁹⁴ *History*, p. 162.

²⁹⁵ The Outsider artist differs from his professional brother in the degree to which this "regression in the service of the ego" can really be said to be in control, or truly at the disposal of the ego. See Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, New York, 1962, pp. 87–117.

²⁹⁶ His landlord, aware of his tenant's precarious situation, had never increased his rent. From time to time, Henry would approach him on his birthday or on major holidays, with the suggestion that a week without rent might be a fitting present, a childlike request that Lerner occasionally went along with. Henry always referred to Nathan as "Mr. Leonard."

²⁹⁷ Darger took most of his meals at Roma's Grill on the corner of Sheffield and Webster. His diet consisted largely of "hot dog sandwiches." He occasionally ate at the Seminary Restaurant, on the corner of Fullerton and Lincoln, a longer walk from the house. He was occasionally able to benefit from meals served at St. Vincent's Church, which had a meal program. There is a photograph of him eating, probably there.

²⁹⁸ Interview with David Berglund, February 20, 1994.

²⁹⁹ Darger's words, quoted by David Berglund (*ibid.*). On occasion, the Berglunds would "swipe" Henry's clothes, wash them, and then agree to give them back, only providing Henry would take a bath. Henry definitely claimed on occasion to be Brazilian (see note 14 above).

³⁰⁰ The priests at St. Vincent's Church visited him briefly at six-month intervals, and would therefore have had some experience of his room. None of the priests who were at the church at that time are there now, and so it has been impossible to interview them.

³⁰¹ Some people found Henry frightening, and avoided contact with him. Nathan Lerner was aware that it required very special tenants to live next to Henry, and to share a bathroom with him. This influenced his choice of suitable tenants.

³⁰² Interview with Mimi Lerner, January 20, 1992. Mimi and her husband shared the third floor with Darger during the summers of 1965 and 1966.

³⁰³ The Lerner's, Kiyoko and Nathan and their children, lived in the house next door. The neighborhood had deteriorated over the years, and was now the ideal low-rent environment for students and artists. Since the tenants at the time were generally young students, it has been possible to locate them. The following individ-

uals have been kind enough to share with me their memories of 851 Webster, and of Henry: Lerner's brother, Marty, and his wife, Mimi (who shared the third floor with Henry during two summers, c. 1965 and 1966); Mary E. Dillon (who lived in the house for eleven years, until 1972); David Berglund, and Betsy Fuchs (the former Mrs. David Berglund), who shared the third floor and the bathroom with Henry from 1970 on, and who knew him better than anyone in his later years; and Mrs. Kiyoko Lerner (who visited Henry's room on occasion to change lightbulbs).

³⁰⁴ Interview with David Berglund, describing his initial impression of Darger.

³⁰⁵ Quoted from an interview with Mary E. Dillon, December 1, 1993.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Henry possessed no radio, though he did have an old record player, with a horn, and a collection of 78's.

³⁰⁷ Taped interview with Betsy Fuchs (Berglund), November 26, 1993.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Nathan Lerner, May 7, 1986.

³⁰⁹ Interview with David Berglund.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ Diary entry for Tuesday, April 2, 1968.

³¹² Diary entry for Sunday, April 7, 1968.

³¹³ Diary entry for Sunday, August 14, 1968.

³¹⁴ Interview with David Berglund. It was on this occasion that it was noted that Henry suffered from a serious hernia, which must have caused him considerable pain.

³¹⁵ Interview with David Berglund.

³¹⁶ Phone interview with Andrew J. Epstein, Saturday, January 29, 1994. This is the view of an outsider. Berglund, who knew Darger personally, remembers, "Outdoors, he seemed a lot more purposeful, a lot more direct." Epstein believes he may have photographed Darger "picking up stuff under the El Tracks – I think, maybe."

³¹⁷ Shortly after Darger's departure from the room, and the discovery of his work, a short 8 millimeter film was shot in the room, in an effort to record some of its contents, particularly the images on the wall. The film was shot at the request of Michael Baruch, by Colleen Fitzgibbon and Michael S. Thompson, who were then students at the Art Institute of Chicago. I would like to thank Ms. Fitzgibbon for making it possible for me to see this important film, on April 11, 1997.

³¹⁸ Interview with David Berglund. Henry never referred to himself as an artist, and never spoke about his painting. Certainly, David never saw him painting. "He was secretive, when it came to his painting, that was something real quiet." In my interviews with him David

Berglund denied ever seeing Darger painting. However, several years later when interviewed by Michael Bonesteel (December 20, 1999), a very different situation is described: "going into his room one day and seeing him at work. I looked over his shoulder as he was doing one of his big paintings." Bonesteel, *Henry Darger*, p. 13.

³¹⁹ Diary entry, September 11, 1969.

³²⁰ *History*, pp. 157–8.

³²¹ Diary entry, Tuesday, April 23, 1968.

³²² Diary entry, Monday, July 15, 1968.

³²³ Diary entry, Saturday, April 6, 1968.

³²⁴ Diary entry, Saturday, April 13, 1968.

³²⁵ Diary entry, Wednesday, April 10, 1968.

³²⁶ Diary entry, Monday, May 13, 1968.

³²⁷ *History*, pp. 106 and 117.

³²⁸ The references to the possibility of adopting a child do not occur in *The History*, but on separate sheets of paper found in the room.

³²⁹ Darger began writing the eight volumes, 5,084 pages, of *The History of My Life* in 1968. On p. 180, he writes, "I moved away to a new place at 851 Webster avenue. I am still there, though it is 1968." On Tuesday, November 4, 1969, he writes, "still writing Life History."

³³⁰ Although David Berglund was in regular contact with Darger, from 1970 on, and in and out of his room constantly, he had not the slightest idea that Darger was writing anything.

³³¹ Darger's late diary, as it survives today, consists of two bound books. The first is a formal date book, printed for use in 1932. He simply wrote in his own dates, beginning on March 24, 1968, and ending Friday, February 21, 1969. (Sadly, this volume of Darger's diary was stolen from the room in 2000.) The second volume, a De Paul Academy notebook, entitled by Darger "Continuation of my Diary," begins on February 22, 1969, with continuous entries up to Thursday, June 26, 1969. There are occasional entries after that, concluding with his final words on January 1, 1972.

³³² Diary entry, Thursday, April 18, 1968.

³³³ Interview with David Berglund. There were at least two birthday parties for Henry, one of which was held in the Berglund apartment and was attended by the Lerner's, the other outdoors in the Lerner's backyard.

³³⁴ Quoted from a taped interview with Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, December 1987. See note 20 above for why Darger believed he was Brazilian. It is not improbable that his father taught him a Brazilian song.

³³⁵ One is inevitably reminded in reading Darger's diaries of the book which Christian children are told is kept in heaven, an account book in which their good and bad deeds are recorded.

³³⁶ This is part of the final page of Darger's diary.

³³⁷ Interview with Betsy Fuchs.

³³⁸ Interview with David Berglund. During the two years that the Berglunds shared the third floor with Darger, they invited him to share their Christmas dinner with them.

³³⁹ Henry's words, quoted from memory by Nathan Lerner during an interview, May 7, 1986.

³⁴⁰ Located close by on Sheffield at Fullerton, this final institution of Darger's life, run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, was also his father's final home. No records survive with the Little Sisters of the Poor for either Darger. "Henry left one week after Thanksgiving, 1972. I walked with Henry, just us two on the icy street, to the Little Sisters of the Poor. I dropped him off and came home. The sisters wanted a trial. He should come and stay overnight and then go home. On Friday morning I went and picked him up. A week later he was admitted." Interview with Kiyoko Lerner.

³⁴¹ Asked what should be done with the contents of his room, Darger simply told Nathan, "It's all yours, please keep it." Thus he assigned the task of preserving his life work to the one person capable of appreciating its true value and of assuming the enormous responsibility.

³⁴² Interview with David Berglund. Another story exists, concerning his instructions as to the fate of his work. Asked by David Berglund what should be done with his paintings and writings, Darger is said to have said they should all be thrown out. "Throw it all away." This story was told to me by Michael Baruch, who says that David Berglund told him this story on several occasions.

³⁴³ "We used to go downtown by 'El,' and every time we stopped to say hello to Henry. He was always by himself in a big hall, in the corner sitting by himself, head down. He recognized us initially, but less and less as we went back." Interview with Nathan Lerner.

³⁴⁴ Medical Certificate of Death, Department of Vital Statistics, Cook County. Darger died of arteriosclerotic heart disease and senility. He is buried in All Saints Cemetery, Des Plaines, Illinois, in a plot owned by the Little Sisters of the Poor, Section 6, Block 13, Grave 19. It is a beautiful place worthy of so great an artist. Nathan Lerner's final gift to Henry was a gravestone. It reads "Henry Darger 1892-1973 / Artist, Protector of Children."

Chapter 2

¹ This chapter, an examination of Darger's unique manner of writing, also provides the reader with a general overview of the subject matter of *The Realms*, briefly introducing various topics found in both Darger's pictorial and written oeuvre. The more important of these topics are then explored in depth in later chapters.

² Letter from Antonin Artaud to Jacques Rivière, May 25, 1924, in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, New York, 1976, p. 43.

³ Jean Dubuffet, "The Demagnetization of Brains," in *Asphyxiating Culture: and Other Writings*, trans. Carol Volk, New York, 1986, pp. 99-100.

⁴ Darger uses this short title at the bottom of p. 1, in place of the much longer official title, thus justifying our use of it. For convenience, I will also refer to the book as *The Realms*, an abbreviation never employed by the author.

⁵ Curiously, this statement is signed, not by H. J. Darger, but by "H.J. Saunders original writer." It is unclear why Darger used this pseudonym on this occasion.

⁶ Although Darger uses the term "Glandeco" as an abbreviation of Glandelinian, he shifts immediately to "Glandco." Elsewhere he refers to the war as the Glandco-Abbieannian war.

⁷ The Outsider P. M. Wentworth similarly insisted on the imaginary character of his pictures, by writing "imaginary" on each of his drawings of life on other planets. See John M. MacGregor, "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Princeton, N.J., 1992, pp. 256-8.

⁸ In exploring this unique work and its motivation, I have used Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* as a crucial point of comparison and contrast in my own thinking, despite the fact that Proust's work is not remotely comparable in length to Darger's vast opus.

⁹ Shortly after the discovery of *The Realms*, Nathan Lerner invited a psychiatrist friend, Dr. Morris Rosenthal, to study the volumes. While he found them interesting and undeniably reflective of pathology, he was dissuaded from working on the material on the one hand by its length, realizing that it would require a lifetime to examine it properly, and on the other hand by his distaste for the poor quality of the work as literature. He still maintains this stance. Interview with Dr. Rosenthal, March 29, 1997.

¹⁰ This observation is not intended to imply that there is not an entire history of literary and psychiatric studies of writings of the insane, extending from J. O. Delapierre, *Histoire littéraire des fous*, London, 1860, to

recent publications such as Inge Jädi, *Leb wohl sagt mein Genie Ordugele muss sein: Text aus der Prinzhornsammlung*, Heidelberg, 1985, or Michel Thevoz, *Ecrits bruts*, Paris, 1979. For a general survey, see Norman Kiell, *Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Literature a Bibliography*, Madison, 1963.

¹¹ The figure 15,209 is based on a page-by-page count of all fifteen volumes, and should replace other speculative figures which are incorrect. Until recently, the most extensive publication of Darger's writings was to be found in John M. MacGregor, *Henry J. Darger. Dan les Royaumes de l'irréel*, Lausanne, 1996, pp. 32-51. A selection of Darger's writings are reproduced in English in this French publication. Recently, Michael Bonesteel has published an extensive selection in English, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000.

¹² The number of bound volumes of illustrations has always remained somewhat obscure. None of the individuals who saw the bound illustrations before they were cut apart, seems to remember precisely how many volumes were involved. Nathan generally held to the figure three, with pictures of different sizes bound in separate volumes. Only one set of covers survives in the room. No attempt appears to have been made to record the sequence of the illustrations or which volumes they came from. In one case, the spine, left over from the process of cutting the volume apart, survives, and it might be possible on the basis of these remnants to reconstruct a single volume. See Darger Archives, American Folk Art Museum, New York.

¹³ This decision was the result of art dealers arguing that the paintings should be placed on the art market, irrespective of their intended function as illustrations.

¹⁴ The Lincoln Asylum appears to have operated a book-binding facility. The various medical reports and case books were bound at the institution. Whether Darger had any involvement with this facility is not known.

¹⁵ This unavoidably makes it exceedingly difficult to refer to specific page references in the individual volumes. However, with Nathan Lerner's permission, I numbered all of the volumes of *The Realms* on the top left corner in pencil, and when necessary I use my own page-numbering system as reference.

¹⁶ Vol. one (bound) 644 pages, vol. two (bound) 915 pages, vol. three (bound) 1,162 pages, vol. four (bound) 1,577 pages, vol. five (bound) 862 pages, vol. six (bound) 933 pages, vol. seven (bound) 1,176 pages, vol. eight (unbound) 836 pages, unnumbered vol. nine (unbound) 2,164 pages, vol. ten (unbound in two parts), part one, 862 pages, part two, 944 pages, vol. eleven (unbound) 908 pages, unnumbered vol. twelve (unbound) 1,210 pages, unnumbered vol. thirteen (unbound) 652 pages, unnumbered vol. A (unbound) 364 pages; total: 15,209 pages. For further information see Appendix B.

¹⁷ Concealed in the binding is a sheet of newspaper with the date July 9, 1932.

¹⁸ Evidence in volume five points to early phases of binding occurring in 1930.

¹⁹ There may have been a connection between the decision to bind the manuscript in the summer of 1932, and the fact that Darger was forced to move from the room he rented from the Anschutz family at 1035 Webster to the room on the third floor of 851 Webster, where he was to spend the rest of his life.

²⁰ Now that ownership of all of the Darger manuscripts has passed to the American Folk Art Museum, New York, it is urgent that some means be found to transfer the text by scanning techniques into a computer to facilitate research and reproduction. However, because the books themselves are masterpieces of Outsider Art, this will involve having an expert conservator take each of the volumes apart, photograph them, and then reassemble the volumes. The volumes will soon be too fragile to handle.

²¹ A possible exception to this observation may be his friend William Schloeder, though it is impossible to imagine Schloeder systematically reading entire volumes since he is said to have been illiterate.

²² There is correspondence preserved in the room with a publisher of songs, with whom Darger seems to have exchanged letters concerning the publication of some of his texts as songs. "The Simplex Company, 1531 Broadway, New York, Oct. 10, 1921. Esteemed friend, You have been referred to us as having written a song which would appeal to the orchestras throughout the country, if presented to them. Our business is to bring your song before the public without any cost to you."

²³ While I have undoubtedly read more of *The Realms* than anyone else, paradoxically any attempt to read it in its entirety would have precluded serious study of, and writing about, Darger's life and work. The reading of each volume requires approximately a year. My systematic reading of *The Realms* continues, with detailed notes on each volume. I have scanned every page so as to be aware of the general content.

²⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 1.

²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 139.

²⁶ Glandelinia was once part of Angelinia, but rebelled and broke off. Thus this is a civil war, and Darger regards it as such.

²⁷ "By Henry J. Darger, the author of thrilling story." *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 1.

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 2.

²⁹ The imaginary events, tortures, mass murder, and massacres of whole populations described in *The Realms* surpass in horror the organized terror and genocide of the Second World War and the death camps. Darger was writing long before these historical events unfolded.

³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 2.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 69.

³² Darger is not exactly consistent concerning the appearance of his characters. Describing the brothers on another occasion, he writes, "Never did Evans see such a Godly looking man. There stood his excellency general Vivian, with his deep blue eyes and golden brown hair, with haughty Roman profile, but with ethereally flexible form and vivacious features. Hanson also stood like a haughty Roman, but had a more decided bearing than general Vivian and as strong as an ox. They were both very tall, ... and they both had such a majestic bearing about them that little Eva despite herself felt awed."

³³ Booth Tarkington (1869–1946) was an extremely successful American author, writing novels for adults. He also wrote for children, with his most popular books, the Penrod series, starting in 1914. Darger's personal library did not contain any of his books, but he was certainly familiar with Penrod.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-302b (604).

³⁵ In vol. twelve (unbound) Evans encounters some difficulty with this multiplicity of Dargers. "Evans was surprised at this letter and did not know what to do. There were sixteen general Henry Dargers in his army, and he did not know which one the note was addressed to." Later we discover that the Darger they are looking for is a Glandelinian general, and not in the Christian ranks at all.

³⁶ Henry's two uncles, August and Charles, were both Masons. No evidence exists at the moment to connect his father with this organization, but Henry may have learned about the lodge and some of their activities from his uncles, and may have modeled his secret society on the Masons. I would like to thank the Grand Secretary Robert Kalb of the Grand Lodge Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Illinois, for supplying information about the participation of the members of Henry's family in the Apollo Lodge of the Masons.

³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 60.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Many aspects of volume one indicate that it was not written first; indeed it contains a version of the final outcome of the war.

⁴⁰ A small number of separate, handwritten manuscripts relating to *The Realms* survive. These handwritten manuscripts can be identified as belonging to specific volumes in the typewritten version of *The Realms*. Darger often dated these handwritten manuscripts on an almost daily basis, and thus they occasionally enable us to date portions of the typed volumes. For example, on this basis it is possible to say that volume nine (unbound) was being written in October 1926, and continuing on to dates in November 1927. See Appendix B.

⁴¹ This is in fact how *The Realms* does end. The final volume is unnumbered volume thirteen.

⁴² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 138.

⁴³ While the present count makes only fifteen volumes, one of the unbound piles of manuscript alone contains 2,164 pages, far too many for even the largest volumes. It is likely that this was originally subdivided. The reference to a book consisting of nineteen volumes does prove that Darger did not include only bound volumes as parts of *The Realms*, but that all the surviving unbound material was in his view also part of the complete manuscript. At the present time it is not possible to determine whether any volume is missing, but it seems unlikely.

⁴⁴ Whether a complete edition of *The Realms* will ever appear remains to be seen.

⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part 1, p. 751.

⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1407.

⁴⁷ Darger's personal collection of books ultimately turned up in the closet down the hall from his room. The books are now in the Darger Archive, American Museum of Folk Art. It is possible that the books which survive now are only part of the collection which was once in the room. Certainly, Darger makes extensive reference to books not now in his collection. Darger's personal collection of phonograph recordings was sold by Nathan Lerner.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 233.

⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-136a.

⁵⁰ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-502.

⁵¹ Johanna Spyri (1827–1901) wrote a number of other stories about young girls.

⁵² In her unique consciousness of a vast drama played out by women on the worlds' stage, this meditation of Violet Vivian is reminiscent of the writings and paintings of the great psychotic master Aloise Corbaz. See Jacqueline Porret-Forêt, *Aloise et le théâtre de l'univers*, Geneva, 1993.

⁵³ Radcliffe is revealed to be the girl heroine Anna Aronburg, niece of General Aronburg, and the sister of the murdered Annie Aronburg. See vol. seven, p. 428.

⁵⁴ *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by the American author Harriet Elizabeth Beecher Stowe (1811–96), was published in 1852.

⁵⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 122. Elsewhere, Little Eva is identified simply as the daughter of the Christian general Augustine St. Claire. "Are you really the little Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin? 'Little Eva in whom?' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" "Never heard of him," answered the little girl, not thinking that was the name of a book." *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 10-251.

⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-7a and 13-8.

⁵⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-10.

⁵⁸ His personal library contained almost no books relating to the American Civil War. One children's novel entitled *Defending His Flag: or A Boy in Blue and a Boy in Gray*, by Edward Stratemeyer (Boston, 1907), does describe the war. There is also a small book entitled *The Wonder Book of the Civil War*. At one point in vol. twelve (unbound), he refers to generals with surprising Roman names: Suetonius and "Baodicea." Clearly he was reading more widely than we might expect.

⁵⁹ The *Chicago Daily News*, Monday, April 3, 1911 (the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the American Civil War), began publication of a long series of articles entitled "Telling the Story of the Rebellion Day by Day." On Saturdays they also published "The Century War Articles."

⁶⁰ Obviously, Darger had two reasons to follow this newspaper very closely in the spring of 1911. Elsie Paroubek had gone missing April 8, the first report of her disappearance appeared in the paper on April 12 (Henry's birthday) with reports continuing until the discovery of her body on Tuesday, May 9, 1911, the issue in which her picture appeared. On April 28, the same paper also noted the death of Father Mahoney: "Father D. S. Mahoney Dead. Roman Catholic Clergyman and former head of the working boys home 1140 West Jackson Boulevard." Obviously Henry would have recognized his name.

⁶¹ It is not impossible that Darger began to write *The Realms* in 1911 in direct response to this series of articles.

⁶² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-511a.

⁶³ The Comtesse de Saint-Fond, in Yukio Mishima's play, *Madame de Sade* (1965).

⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 468.

⁶⁵ *The Realms* vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-135. This passage is unique in mentioning Darger's mother.

⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction.

⁶⁷ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 459.

⁶⁸ One thinks of the worlds constructed by Adolf Wolfl and Aloise Corbaz, assembled within the constraints of a closed psychiatric institution with few possibilities of intellectual growth to be found. Yet, in both of these cases, newspapers and illustrated magazines were available and were used in giving expression to the internal drives of these psychotic individuals.

⁶⁹ Curiously, Darger's personal library, which may not be complete in its present state, did not contain a dictionary, though it is exceedingly difficult to imagine he didn't own one.

⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-600.

⁷¹ For anyone familiar with contemporary literature, this sermon immediately calls to mind the famous sermon on Hell in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Darger's sermon differs from that of Joyce, in being immeasurably more violent, and explicitly sadistic. Like Joyce, he was particularly interested in its effect on children, in this case his little girl heroines.

⁷² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-600.

⁷³ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 500. For further discussion of this curiously heretical passage, see chapter 12 below, p. 617.

⁷⁴ Because we know little as yet about how Darger actually constructed the work, in particular whether it was written chronologically, page by page, it is difficult to be certain about the question of an overall plan. The wildly erratic page numbering provides evidence that he constantly shifted the contents of various volumes about, and even specific volumes were renumbered, with the dates of battles changed by a year or more. While some statements made early in volume one seem to imply a knowledge of the final outcome of the war, and of events occurring in later volumes, it is far from certain when those parts of volume one were written.

⁷⁵ Darger constantly refers to generals or other military personnel as being "mortally wounded." These individuals invariably recover, and continue to appear in later battles, suggesting that Darger didn't understand the meaning of the term.

⁷⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁷ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 434.

⁷⁸ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 435.

⁷⁹ John Stuart Mill, quoted in Northrup Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton, 1957, p. 5.

⁸⁰ There is a curious tendency in all of us to underestimate the actual amount of time invested in fantasy each day; it is probably much larger than we admit.

⁸¹ Such a "retreat" is probably possible only in situations where there has been a period of emotional development, and at least some human bonding, prior to the traumatic onset of a situation of intense deprivation.

⁸² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-493a.

⁸³ His own name appears in many variations, connected with totally different characters fighting on both sides in the war. Henry Joseph Darger appears on the Christian side, at the same time that General Joseph Henry Darger is fighting on behalf of the Glandelinians. General Henry Dargerina is a more feminine-sounding version of his name.

⁸⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 349.

⁸⁵ Word play of this kind, based primarily on clang associations, is well known in the context of schizophrenia.

⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-483.

⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-506.

⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 89-90. It is highly likely that a source will one day be found for this passage. Darger's writing style will ultimately be seen to involve as much "collage" as his drawings.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-460a.

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 19-21. We will return to this passage, and this picture, again when we discuss the tornado that provides the setting for the death of Hanson's wife and daughter as a parallel to Henry's own experience of loss.

⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-272. I have not yet located this reference in the writings of William James (1842-1910).

⁹² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-273. The final word is something of a mystery.

⁹³ As immigrants to America, Darger's father and two paternal uncles may have told stories of the hardships of leaving their homeland for another country.

⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1315.

⁹⁵ *The Realms* [vol. unknown], p. 203. Revenge is an important theme in Darger's life. We will return to this passage again, in the context of his early experience of life in institutions.

⁹⁶ In that the unbound volumes of *The Realms* were not numbered in anything resembling a chronological order (indeed at the present time it isn't even clear how many distinct volumes there are), this question is far more difficult to answer than one might expect. The end does occur in a volume presently identified as volume thirteen (unbound). See Appendix B.

⁹⁷ See chapter 6, pp. 322-323.

⁹⁸ Proust makes similar demands on the reader, in terms of leisurely narrative flow, and total immersion in a rarefied and self-contained other world.

⁹⁹ For instance the writing of Italo Calvino; see his novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

¹⁰⁰ A much earlier literary parallel, presumably unknown to Darger, is the historical accounts of perverse massacres described in ancient Assyrian texts which rival Darger in their horror.

¹⁰¹ An oddly similar image of the creative process is attributed to Renoir, who is said to have stated, "I can no more not paint, than not piss."

¹⁰² Consideration of Darger's mental state in terms of its approximation to recognized psychiatric or neurological conditions will be presented briefly in Appendix A. For the time being, my intention is to examine the unique characteristics of his inner world in the absence of any limiting diagnostic categories.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of the history of response to art forms originating in the context of the most extreme mental states, see my book *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, Princeton, 1989.

¹⁰⁴ To assume that the abnormal mental state (psychosis) of a creative artist must inevitably preclude meaningful aesthetic response to his work is a serious and all too common error. The tendency of certain psychiatrists and psychoanalysts to move from clinical to art critical assessment of psychotic art, in the absence of any knowledge or experience of the acknowledged masterpieces of this rarest of artistic forms, is a tragic blunder.

Chapter 3

¹ In referring to Henry's room, there is a tendency to think only of the last of his rooms, in which he lived for the final forty years of his life. Most of his mature collage-drawings were done in that room. But we must bear in mind that, prior to 1932, Henry lived in another rented room, and that the writing of much of *The Realms* was done in that earlier room. It is still uncertain how long he lived with the family of Mr. and Mrs. Emil Anschutz at 1035 Webster. The evidence suggests that he moved there in 1922 or 1923.

² This is not fanciful writing. Henry, as we will see, altered the eyes in most of the pictures which decorated his room, so as to make them highly reflective. As a result they do glitter.

³ Because we still know so little of Darger's childhood and family background, it has not as yet been possible to identify any of these photographs, or to link them with certainty to his family. Two of the largest of these pictures, on the basis of costume and period style, are probably portraits of one set of his grandparents, but it has not been possible to prove this to be the case.

⁴ Henry's room, long preserved by Nathan Lerner, no longer exists. Much of this book was in fact written in that wonderful room, which contained so much of Darger's reality.

⁵ The seven bound volumes, along with the unbound piles of manuscript, were in fact in the steamer trunks which were in the room, the long bound volumes of paintings presumably concealed behind masses of newspapers stacked against the wall.

⁶ The decision of Nathan Lerner to preserve vast amounts of comparative material, at a time when it was completely impossible to evaluate Henry's future importance, is difficult to explain. He explained it in terms of his inability to throw anything out, but it is clear that he had perceived the need for Henry's art to be seen in a context, and it was this he sought to save for posterity. Our understanding of Henry's work and image-making process is entirely dependent on the preserved material. At the insistence of Nathan Lerner, the first exhibition ever held of Henry Darger's work, at the Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, November 5, 1977, included a large amount of this comparative material.

⁷ The surviving magazine bundles have not been opened since Henry's departure from the room. Many had been moved to Nathan's garage, but were later returned to the room at my request. Since Henry often placed drawings and other images between the leaves of magazines, it is very important that these bundles be opened and checked. They may also provide source material, in terms of missing pages, for a detailed study of Henry's early work. One group of magazines I would specially like to locate or identify are the German periodicals with sepia photographs, which provided so much of the material for the early collages.

⁸ Adolf Wolfl, living in the Waldau Asylum, also cut out pictures having a perceived connection to his inner world, reidentifying them in connection with his internal imagery. His absolute denial of outer reality in favor of the internal world is typical of the psychotic process, and differs in this respect from Darger's similar reidentification of images.

⁹ It is not unusual in individuals with a very severely impaired self-image to observe an unusual relationship to trash, to broken and rejected objects, and to garbage dumps. There is a curious desire, based seemingly on identification, to "save" such material, to bring it home, and to live with it.

¹⁰ Interestingly, the coloring books were not filled first, and glued together later. Half-empty volumes indicate that the huge books were made first, and then filled as clippings accumulated. A very large number of these homemade scrapbooks still exist, some in the original bundles tied with twine. These too remain to be opened and examined in detail, in case they contain original drawings.

¹¹ It seems possible that Henry's taste for cartoons and comics originated as an aspect of life with his father, an intelligent older man who we know taught Henry to read at home.

¹² Title from label on the front cover of one of the fire journals.

¹³ Familiarity with Henry's interests makes it possible to predict those subjects which have been organized as scrapbooks. Once the bundles of scrapbooks have been opened and studied, more such specialized scrapbooks will be discovered.

¹⁴ Since Easter seals are invariably dated, they provide dates prior to which the "framed" picture could not have been made. Some of the "framed pictures" include seals from several years, in which case, the latest dated seal is the more significant. It is possible, however, that the idea of surrounding mounted pictures with a border of Easter seals came long after some of the pictures had been made, and that Henry simply "framed" all of his collection as seals became available. Often a single picture contains seals from several years.

¹⁵ My own slightly unnerving discovery of these pencilled additions occurred in Henry's room under precisely these conditions.

¹⁶ This response is common in psychotic art. A more extreme example is found in the art of Adolf Wolfl, where the eyes are treated as a kind of mask. Aloise too masked the eyes with strange blue unseeing covers.

¹⁷ See my article "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," *Raw Vision*, 13 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 26-35, where I suggested for the first time that the pathological obsession with this lost photograph was tied in with the loss of his baby sister. In thinking about this sister, it is essential to realize that she was presumably still living

"out there somewhere," possibly even in Chicago. Henry never speaks of this fact, but betrays his unconscious awareness of it endlessly.

¹⁸We will return to this point in chapter 11, where it will become apparent that this observation was frighteningly true, and very disturbing to visitors to the room after Henry's departure.

¹⁹At this stage in Darger's work, great care must be taken to differentiate found drawings from works by the artist's hand. The inscription written in brush with black ink is helpful in that it provides evidence of his brushwork, which is also to be seen in details such as the stone textures on the building or in the fence in the background. I am of the opinion that this is by Darger, and that no traced drawing underlies it.

²⁰It is difficult to be certain that this is not a photograph rather than a drawing, but either way Darger was not the artist behind the original image.

²¹In a separate journal to which I have given the name "Reference Ledger," Darger has a list entitled "Names of Christian Generals in Pictures" which may refer to the small portraits we are examining, although these pictures are by no means confined to Christian generals, but include many of the generals from the opposing armies. See Reference Ledger, pp. 419 and 418. The list is unfortunately not complete.

²²It is worth considering the possibility that he may have been tracing portraits of Civil War participants, from books on the subject. No such books have been found in his room.

²³The date is scribbled in pencil, but clearly readable. The slip is also stamped August 14, 1918.

²⁴Previously it has been assumed that the attempt to illustrate *The Realm* came years after the writing had been completed. Darger the writer and Darger the artist were seen as separated by a considerable span of years.

²⁵Coloring books were in use a hundred years ago. Children's painting books first appeared about 1870, crayons shortly after the turn of the century. See Lesley Gordon, *Peepshow into Paradise: A History of Children's Toys*, p. 221, and still more useful, Dian Zillner, *Collectible Coloring Books*, West Chester, Penn., 1992. Living alone with his son, and working long hours as a tailor, may have led Darger senior to seek ways to keep the boy amused. As well as teaching him to read, perhaps he also encouraged him to draw, to color, and to make scrapbooks from material collected from the newspapers. Did his "Weather Books," scrapbooks on fires, train wrecks, and natural disasters have their origin at this time? At school he may have been encouraged to make pictures, but scrapbooks and collage would have been less likely at the turn of the century. I would like to express my thanks to Elizabeth Overmyer of the Bay Area Library and Information System, for doing extensive research into the little known area of the history of children's coloring books.

²⁶I do not claim that the use of "illusionistic collage" is unique to Darger, or that it may not have been employed before, but I do believe Henry invented it for himself, in the absence of any knowledge either that he was making "collages," or that such a technique had been employed elsewhere. At present no date exists for the smaller illusionistic collages, but in relation to the huge collage *The Battle of Calverhine* they may be assumed to date to the later 1920s.

²⁷A 1992 series of advertisements for the American Express company utilized the same principle in constructing illusionistic collages depicting European cities.

²⁸The actual material used for this coating has not yet been identified.

²⁹None of the illusionistic collages had been exhibited to my knowledge until 2001, when one or two were shown in the exhibition at PS 1, in New York.

³⁰Nathan Lerner told me that there is documentation indicating that Henry attempted to enlist in the Second World War, but was not accepted. I have found nothing to support this claim.

³¹116 5/8 inches x 37 7/16 inches. These measurements include the frame built by Darger for this work. An integral part of the work, it is not a true frame but consists of two wooden rectangles nailed together, with the collage sandwiched between them. Additional backing material, corrugated cardboard, and wooden slats, nailed to the frame, complete the supportive sandwich of material. An astonishing number of nails were hammered through the work, from the front face into the layer of backing. Since these were finishing nails they have not held.

I want to thank Michael Baruch for going to the enormous trouble of bringing equipment to Darger's room in order to make photographs using polarizing filters. In this way it became possible to obtain the first usable photograph of *The Battle of Calverhine*, and to see it more clearly than is possible in reality. Michael was one of the first art students to become involved in the study of Darger's work, soon after its discovery. It is largely as a result of his enthusiasm and contacts that the early photographs of the room were made, and the first film documenting the contents of the room was shot.

³²It is to be hoped that Darger's growing fame will in time draw the attention of conservators to this threatened picture, allowing the destructive processes to be halted, if not reversed. It would make an ideal case for a class involved in the study of paper conservation and restoration. At present it needs a solid plywood backing to which it can be bolted so as to prevent its collapse.

³³The identical date is repeated on three sheets of paper which form part of the back. A label on one of the outer pieces of cardboard has a date, January 31, 1930. One of the pieces of backing cardboard nailed into the

work includes the address of St. Joseph's Hospital, an institution Darger has ceased to work at in June 1923.

³⁴I have not been able to discover a date on the small illusionistic collages which would verify this, and do not yet know the source of the sepia collage fragments.

³⁵So far, it has not been possible to identify this flag on the basis of the many flags drawn individually and identified by Darger.

³⁶Matthew 19: 14. Darger's insistence on the innocence and importance of little children is perfectly in accord with Christian ideals.

³⁷Some of the pictures seem to be eighteenth-century paintings of little girls, by artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds. If so, this would represent the earliest instance of Darger unknowingly incorporating material belonging to the fine arts rather than popular culture.

³⁸Quoted from the label which appears below the picture of Catherine Vivian. The break in the montaged picture obscures the remaining text.

³⁹As yet, I have no evidence beyond apparent age for dating this image. If we trust the evidence of age and fragility, then these images may be the oldest in the room.

⁴⁰References to the mimic altar occur in several places in Darger's writings. In unbound and unnumbered volume thirteen, the concluding volume of *The Realm*s, on p. 13-288 [3490], in "Report number fourteen," he says, "Storming heaven for the petition ... Erecting mimic-altar to pray before, in order to obtain petition, before the destruction of the Christian armies arrive. Sacrifices will also be made, for the granting of the petition. Making the mimic chapel neat and clean, no matter how much work. Buying materials of all sorts for shrine." Then, on August 11, 1913, in "Predictions," p.13-290a [3495], we are told, "On August 1912, Club through reasons not stated here was broken up by mysterious explosion. Great loss in child pictures on account of it ... Altar thrown down. Cain to be paid to the Christian nations." I am speculating that although the altar was thrown down, some pictures associated with it survived in Henry's room.

⁴¹This picture, and the situation that inspired it, is reminiscent of Edvard Munch's early painting *The Sick Child*, which was inspired by the death of his sister: "My home was to my art as the midwife is to her children."

⁴²What I am suggesting here is that drawing, pure creation out of nothing, was associated in Darger's mind with conception, and therefore with sexual activity. This was an area of normal functioning he felt unable to enter.

⁴³This personal ritual invented by Darger is related to similar rituals commonly employed in ancient Egyptian culture, in which *ka* statues, mere pieces of sculpture in the tomb, were brought to life through magical rituals known as "the opening of the eyes, and the opening of the mouth."

⁴⁴I have given this work a title in order to distinguish it from all other depictions of the Vivian sisters, and to emphasize both its large size, and its unique importance.

⁴⁵The rest of this important inscription is damaged, broken off of the lower edge. As we will see, this segment of the collage-drawing depicts four large female children seated on a bench, accompanied by three additional smaller female children and a dog. The boy, Penrod, is not depicted in this segment. In the four remaining segments, three additional large images of girls appear, along with an equally large depiction of a boy. All of the children are in related costumes. The label formed part of the total composition, and refers to all five segments which were at one time joined as one single enormous work.

⁴⁶The backing of this long collage is not strong. Darger joined pieces of box cardboard together with paper. The collage accordingly broke apart along the paper joins. The varnished pictures have become incredibly fragile, with pieces breaking off every time they are handled. Despite fading of the color, and some darkening of the varnish, this collage-drawing is far more clearly visible than *The Battle of Calverhine*, and, once restored, will be worthy of exhibition and study.

⁴⁷It is possible that the sequence of segments shown in the photograph of the room was not the original sequence prior to the break-up of the work, although it would be natural for Darger to hang it in the original order in which it was made. The first two segments, in that the paneled wall and the bench continue from one to the other, are clearly contiguous. The two fragments at far right were still connected, so they belong together.

⁴⁸The fact that no Vivian girl is depicted in this panel, while in panel three two of the sisters are depicted, supports the hypothesis that all of the panels once formed part of a single continuous collage-drawing.

⁴⁹Possibly this is because the collage fragment which once covered this figure fell away completely, leaving the underlying drawing visible.

⁵⁰Thus far it has not been possible to date this important work on the basis of internal evidence. In time it may be possible to discover one or more of the borrowed elements of the collage in dated magazines or newspapers.

⁵¹The left-over sheets of used carbon paper preserve vestiges of drawings where ink has been removed through tracing. When held up to the light, partial drawings can be seen. These carbon sheets are in such a fragmentary condition that it is not worthwhile to preserve them. Since the actual tracings survive in the room, it is possible to study the process without reliance on the carbon-paper sheets.

⁵² The only exception I can think of would be several pages torn from *Life* magazine which reproduced an altarpiece by Jan van Eyck. For Darger this was simply a religious image, and not a work of art. He also cut out an illustration of an artist at work by Norman Rockwell.

⁵³ *The Realms*, vol. three, pp. 129–30. Later, Penrod shows his drawing to his boy scout lieutenant, the Rattlesnake Boy, who comments: "This is surely a great gift from God himself. It is the best gift of all. And it proves that it is absolutely true that your mind has got good and perfect training. The more you draw, the better you'll be able to draw. Do the best you can, and draw everything you can lay your hands on."

⁵⁴ It is possible that Darger's conviction that he couldn't draw was derived from an excessive dependence on coloring books in his childhood. These books serve to inhibit natural freehand drawing in children, while at the same time providing an unconsciously influential model of what "drawing" is. There is also a close relationship between coloring-book drawings and the illustrations used in turn-of-the-century children's elementary readers. All such imagery pertaining to Darger's childhood is of extreme importance in understanding his conception of drawing and of narrative illustration.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between primitive ideas of magic and those encountered in schizophrenia, see Geza Roheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia*, Bloomington, Ind., 1970.

⁵⁶ While Darger does make use of two- and three-panel collage-drawings, the panels only occasionally involve sequential events. For an example, see illustration 3.69.

⁵⁷ I would like to thank Ms. Paola Muggia Stuff, Curator of the Cartoon Art Museum, San Francisco, for her help in identifying many of the comic strips which Darger cut out and saved, and details of which he frequently employed in his drawings. Little Orphan Annie was created by Harold Gray, making her debut on August 5, 1924. Little Annie Rooney was created by Brandon Walsh and San Francisco artist Darrell McClure, as a competitive rival of Little Orphan Annie, by the Hearst Syndicate. The strip first appeared on January 10, 1929, and ended April 16, 1966. See *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, ed. Maurice Horn, New York, 1976.

⁵⁸ *Mandrake the Magician* was written by Lee Falk and drawn by artist Phil Davis. Created on June 11, 1934.

⁵⁹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 363b [727].

⁶⁰ Examination of the surface of the collage-drawings makes it quite certain that most of the figures of adults in uniform, on horseback, and in pursuit, were also traced. Only a few tracing drawings of adults or of horses have been found in the room. This is something of a mystery. Did Darger only save images of little girls and throw out the rest?

⁶¹ When McClure started drawing this strip he was twenty-seven years old. The strip we are examining was published in 1948, and enlarged photographically by Darger in that year. McClure was forty-five in 1948, Darger fifty-six.

⁶² Many drawing teachers, and in particular Kimon Nicolaides, emphasize a training procedure known as "contour drawing," in which the student looks, not at his paper, but at the model, allowing his pencil to move, in imagination, slowly along the surface of the model's body. Such sensuous contact with the naked model is felt to be of great value in enhancing perception and awareness of subtly shifting contours. Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw*, Boston, 1959.

⁶³ Whether true Outsider photography is possible remains to be seen. In recent years the photography of the European artist brut August Walla (b. 1936) has been put forward as psychologically related to his drawings. In America the photographs of Eugene von Bruenchenhein (1910–83), and of Outsider sculptor Morton Bartlett (1909–92), have been proposed as reflective of an Outsider aesthetic. Bartlett's work and creative process represents an important parallel to Darger, and both would benefit from comparative study.

⁶⁴ Initially, Darger used Rosenthal Bros. Drugs, 2200 Halsted N., at the corner of his street. In 1946, this store changed hands, and became Foster Drugs. In 1957, he took his business to another drug store, Krupkin Drugs, at 959 Webster, at the corner of Sheffield, which was even closer to his house.

⁶⁵ There is a period, which I believe comes early in the mature style, when he repeats the same images again and again in a single composition. This may have resulted from the fact that at that period he had very few enlarged images available to him. Later he abandoned this use of serial repetition, favoring a more naturalistic distribution of dissimilar figures.

⁶⁶ Eighty dated envelopes survive. Some contain several images or negatives, on the basis of which we can construct a chronology of Darger's mature work. But since he used these enlargements again and again, the date on an envelope can establish only that a given work could not have been made before that date. And because Darger was such a regular customer, the drug stores sometimes neglected to date his orders, and the negatives or enlarged prints associated with these envelopes cannot therefore be dated.

⁶⁷ Darger (and much later Nathan Lerner) frequently mixed up an envelope's contents which occasionally fail to accord with the label on the outside.

⁶⁸ The cost of processing was invariably indicated on the Kodak envelopes, and it would be easily possible to arrive at the total cost of all of Darger's photographic processing during the fifteen years in which he was having enlargements made. Another problem which we have not examined is the cost of the vast amount of

artist materials stored in his room.

⁶⁹ The text reads: "Oh well, I guess there's just no use even hopin' – Mrs. Meany is right. Why should anyone remember my birthday?" For a boy raised, like Annie was, in an orphanage, these lines would have possessed intense meaning. This is especially the case in that Darger's own childhood experience of an "orphanage" involved a Father Meaney (see above p. 40).

⁷⁰ Dated film-processing envelopes first appear in 1944, and continue, with the exception of 1953 and 1956, until 1959. It is possible that all of Darger's mature work is datable to those years, although, since he possessed a collection of 246 enlarged images, he could readily have gone on working from this source for many years. Why did he stop ordering enlargements in 1959?

⁷¹ Male genitals were usually only added when the legs were depicted wide apart. It is possible that he believed they would not be visible when the little girl had her legs together. For detailed discussion of the added genitals, see chapter 10.

⁷² It is not possible to photograph these tracing incisions successfully.

⁷³ We must bear in mind that Darger's response to these images may have differed dramatically from that of the average adult viewer who must come to grips with facts which are all but impossible to rationalize.

⁷⁴ No attempt has yet been made to inquire into the response of children to Darger's storytelling in *The Realms*, or to the collage-drawings. Although many of the images, both in the text and in the pictures, fall well outside of what is usually seen as acceptable subjects for children, I suspect that his small viewers might readily accept the violence, sexual ambiguousness, and pictorial style with enthusiasm.

⁷⁵ The transfer onto the wall surface of repeated identical images to suggest spatial recession is an example. Ancient Egyptian artists also preferred the long narrow format used by Darger.

⁷⁶ See for example Ernst Gombrich, "Formula and Experience," in *Art and Illusion*, Princeton, N.J., 1969, pp. 146–78.

⁷⁷ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 701.

⁷⁸ The strongest influence on the style of the collage-drawings was the pictorial creations of American comic strip illustrators. These often undervalued artists may have provided the major conduit whereby elements derived from more sophisticated pictorial traditions and sources entered Darger's work without his being conscious of it. An example would be a possible influence derived from Japanese woodblock prints, which it is unlikely Darger had any knowledge of.

⁷⁹ It may also be the subtle influence of Pop Art that has made it possible for us to appreciate the extraordinary value and uniqueness of Darger's creative work.

Chapter 4

¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 559a.

² *The Journals of André Gide*, trans. Justine O'Brien, vol. 1 (1889–1913), New York, 1937, p. 30.

³ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 113.

⁴ Instances of a similar tendency are detectable in the animal kingdom, most obviously in the world of insects, where massive events approximating to organized invasions can be observed. See August Forel, *The Social World of Ants*, New York, 1930. Jane Goodall has also reported clear instances of prolonged warfare between neighboring chimpanzee populations. For a contrasting viewpoint, see Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, New York, 1973, or *Psychological Bases of War*, ed. Heinrich Z. Winnik, Raphael Moses, and Mortimer Ostow, New York, 1973.

⁵ Along with a host of historical and political elements contributing to the onset of the Second World War, psychologists and historians have written extensively about the individual psychological factors present in the personality of Adolf Hitler which shaped him as the inevitable leader of this vast conflict, determining the uniquely destructive character and extent of this war. See W. C. Langer, *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*, New York, 1972, and Erik Erikson, "The Legend of Hitler's Childhood," in *Childhood and Society*, second edition, New York, 1963, pp. 326–58.

⁶ Darger's spelling of these unusual names varies. He first refers to this war as the Glandeco-Anglinian war storm, but later it usually appears as Glandco, and frequently as the Glandco-Abbieannian war.

⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 138.

⁸ The final volume of *The Realms* is a presently unnumbered pile of pages identified by me simply as volume thirteen. The end of the war, as depicted in this volume, will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

⁹ Darger has far less difficulty than the average reader in remembering past battles and other events, often pausing in later volumes to refer back to earlier incidents in the war.

¹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction.

¹¹ *The Realms* [vol. unknown], ch. 26, p. 308.

¹² Responding to an inquiry concerning books on the Civil War which Darger might have used, Professor James M. McPherson wrote me, "As for books on the Civil War popular at the turn of the century – they were legion, probably almost as numerous as today, so it would be hard to single out anything in particular that Darger might have read ... There were also many children's books on heroes of the Civil War, etc. – many on Lincoln alone, several on Lee, etc."

¹³ The numbers of participants and of casualties in the Civil War was, and has remained, a matter of dispute. One of the books Henry could have consulted as a boy was Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America 1861-1865*, Boston, 1901.

¹⁴ General Jack Evans speaking to his staff, *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-232 [3374].

¹⁵ It is not unusual for psychiatric patients confined in institutions to become involved with pseudo-scientific projects of various kinds (diagrams and writings on biological, medical, philosophical, or even mechanical topics - perpetual motion machines), which have as one of their purposes denial of the supposed lack of intelligence which they associate with mental illness. See M. Tramer, *Technisches Schaffen Geisteskranker*, Munich, 1926. My unpublished monograph, *Frank Travis: The Imaginary Machine: Mechanomorphic Imagery and the Art of the Insane*, contains a discussion of elaborate diagrams of this kind.

¹⁶ The importance of adolescent fantasy activity in a situation of severe institutional deprivation is beautifully described in Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*, Chicago, 1930. "I got lonely and sullen and full of fear, but my dreams kept me alive, and I dreamed every day. There I started to be a dreamer of dreams." p. 63. See my discussion of the role of ongoing fantasy, and the construction of systematized alternate worlds, in "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 246-79.

¹⁷ See *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-193 [2467].

¹⁸ A highly systematized alternate world with maps of truly obsessional complexity and detail is to be seen in the psychotic realm of Aocicnori, drawn and reproduced in quantity in 1965 by newly discovered Outsider artist Scotlund L. Moore of Houston, Texas. I would like to thank Dr. Jeffrey L. Sandler of San Francisco for drawing my attention to the work of Moore.

¹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 63.

²³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 1.

²⁴ Curiously, the war of 1841 is usually referred to as the fifth. Perhaps he was counting back from the final war.

²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one.

²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 151.

²⁷ The choice of the family name Vivian obviously demands explanation. One would expect it to derive from the American Civil War. For this reason I was very

grateful when Sam Farber, of New York, drew my attention to a reference to a John Vivian, "a popular Confederate cavalry officer," in David McCullough's biography of Truman. Strangely, no such cavalry officer appears in any history of the Civil War, and my letter of inquiry to McCullough went unanswered. The Harry S. Truman Library informed me that the only source connecting J. Vivian Truman to a civil war figure is his obituary in the *New York Times*, Friday July 9, 1965, in which he responded to a question about this supposed ancestor, saying, "I never heard that until Harry got in the White House. So far as I heard tell, an aunt of mine proposed Vivian because she liked it."

I owe to Professor James M. McPherson, responding to my request for information about any Vivians who might have participated in the Civil War, the name of John H. Vivian, a Wisconsin surgeon. (There were also a number of Vivians.) Since Darger's mother, Rosa Fullman-Darger, is said to have come from Wisconsin, it would obviously be of interest if it were possible to establish some connection between her family and the Civil War surgeon John Vivian. No research into the history of her family has been done as yet.

The shift in Robert Vivian's status from mere Governor to Emperor occurs late in the story and is not, as far as I know, explained. It may parallel events in the career of Napoleon, with which Darger would certainly have been familiar.

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-576a.

²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 312.

³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3231.

³¹ The inscription is found on the lower surface of the picture. In accord with his early "Portraits of Generals," Darger has overpainted a borrowed illustration, using gray paint to suggest the Glandelinian uniform.

³² The death of Germania Vivian is described in vol. thirteen, pp. 117 and 121.

³³ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3097.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction. The name Heidi was undoubtedly derived from the heroine of the book by Johanna Spyri, first published in English in 1884. Darger's edition was published in Chicago in 1921, and contains his handwritten inscription, "This is personal property. Please do not take these books what are in this room." He also owned a second edition dated 1934. Darger's library contained not only this book, but four other less well-known titles by the same author.

³⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 241.

³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-48 [93].

³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 509.

³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 731. Elsewhere he refers to "those fellows with the college student hats."

³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 320.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-142a.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-404.

⁴² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3094.

⁴³ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 155.

⁴⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Early in *The Realms* an evil character from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Simon Legree, a brutal slave owner, makes a brief appearance and is dealt with firmly by a Blengin. Darger's library did not contain a copy of this book, but he did own Edward Stratemeyer's Civil War children's novel *Defending His Flag: or A Boy in Blue and a Boy in Gray*, Boston, 1907.

⁴⁶ The existence of child slavery as a reality was not unknown to Darger. In 1911, while following various articles in the *Chicago Daily News*, he would have been able to read an article of unusual interest to him. "Babies made slaves. Children torn from their mothers are sent far from Chicago." This article appeared on April 20, beside the series on the Civil War, making it probable that Darger would have seen it. One can imagine its importance to Henry, because of his missing sister.

⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3388. This speech to the troops is made by King Gannon of Abbieannia.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 155. (This aspect of Glandelinian behavior is discussed at length in chapter 11 below.)

⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 155.

⁵⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 1. This Aronburg mystery is discussed in detail in chapter 9 below. See also my article, "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," *Raw Vision*, 13 [Winter 1995/96], pp. 26-35.

⁵¹ In the writings of de Sade a fundamental link is established between extreme forms of sadistic violence and blasphemy, with the two often mixed. This is also to be seen in Darger.

⁵² *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 116-117.

⁵³ Reference Ledger.

⁵⁴ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound).

⁵⁵ In different places, Darger states that he began the writing of *The Realms* in 1910, 1911, and 1912. He maintains that the earliest volumes were lost or stolen, presumably those of 1910, if any such early volumes really existed. The writing of what survives probably began in 1911. This is also the date he gives for the beginning of the Glandco-Angelinian War. He says he started typing *The Realms* in 1916. It should not be assumed, however, that the work was completed and then typed. Most of the book can be seen to have been created directly on the typewriter, with only a small amount of handwritten manuscript draft preserved. The Glandco-Angelinian war is brought to an end in 1916,

having lasted four years and seven months, seven months longer than the American Civil War which lasted almost exactly four years.

⁵⁶ This preoccupation with the Civil War has never really died out. Some 50,000 books have been written about it, with hundreds of new ones appearing each year. Darger's obsession with the war was by no means unique.

⁵⁷ For reasons which are not immediately clear, the day chosen for the beginning of the semicentennial celebrations was not, in fact, Darger's birthday, but Monday, April 3, 1911. See "Cannon in Salute; Honor Anniversary of Great Civil War," *Chicago Daily News*, April 3, 1911, p. 1.

⁵⁸ We know for certain that Darger was reading this newspaper regularly, because it was in this paper, at exactly this time, that he was following accounts of the search for the missing little girl Elsie Paroubek [see chapter 9].

⁵⁹ In this connection it is important to bear in mind that volume one of *The Realms* contains a good deal of material that was clearly not written at the beginning of the work, but seemingly later in the process, perhaps early in 1918 or even later.

⁶⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 194.

⁶¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-468a.

⁶² The House of Representatives voted for war on April 6, 1917, only a few days prior to Henry's twenty-fifth birthday. This war too was to last almost exactly four years, ending in April 1918.

⁶³ Darger's honorable discharge papers, issued on December 28, 1917, were found in his room in Chicago.

⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," pp. 295-304.

⁶⁵ It is not at all unusual for a psychotic break to be occasioned, in a susceptible individual, by a move to an unfamiliar environment or a new and stressful living situation.

⁶⁶ Approximately two million Americans were shipped to France, to participate in a war which could not have been won without their aid.

⁶⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-207b [413].

⁶⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 194.

⁶⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four.

⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 114 and 116.

⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-594b.

⁷² *The Realms*, vol. three.

⁷³ *The History of My Life*, pp. 29-30. Henry is here referring presumably to the Battle of Sedan (1870). Born in 1843, Uncle August Darger would, in fact, have been twenty-seven during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

⁷⁴ Darger also mentions being told by someone in his family that he was seven years old at the time of the One Hundred Days War with Spain [1898]. Henry was then six.

⁷⁵ As is the case with many American Civil War battles, the battles in *The Realms* not uncommonly have two names, reflecting the designation given to the battle by each of the two warring sides.

⁷⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-593 [2895]. "Through the entire war up to this time there were about 565 battles and incidents, both sides predicted to have won an equal number of battles though now the Christians were really winning the entire war."

⁷⁷ I have at present no explanation for the fact that depictions of the Battle of Jennie Riches are extremely frequent in the titles of the collage-drawings, far more frequent than can be explained by the prominence of this battle in the text. This remains a major unexplained problem in Darger studies.

⁷⁸ Darger's early experiments with illusionistic collage first introduced the long and narrow scroll format, though on a much smaller scale. Given the unusual scroll-like format he uses, it might be that he was influenced by the wide film screen which had become common in America in the 1950s. The wide screen was in use intermittently in Hollywood films from the 1920s on, particularly in the Magnascope process.

⁷⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-590 [2890].

⁸⁰ Such borrowings occur with some regularity in Darger's writing, but given the vast literature of the Civil War already in existence by 1900, it is almost impossible to detect or identify these collaged literary fragments.

⁸¹ In the later part of the twentieth century, war seen through the eyes of child victims became far less uncommon. One need only think of the child casualties of the wars in Ireland, Palestine, or the former Yugoslavia to see the realization of Darger's vision of children living amidst war.

⁸² Darger writes extensively of boy and girl scout armies, and these child armies do play a very active part in the war effort. What is not known is whether he himself had any involvement in childhood with the boy scouts. He certainly had very definite fantasy ideas about both boy and girl scouts, their uniforms, their abilities, and the strong bonds of friendship connecting scout children.

⁸³ *The Realms*, vol. five, inserted statement dated "July Twenty Sixth, 1926."

⁸⁴ The Battle of Norma Catherine appears in an unbound volume now identified as volume nine. I am inclined to believe that the Christian defeat at the Battle of Norma Catherine occurs midway through the story, long before the siege of Vivian Wickey in volume twelve (unbound).

⁸⁵ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-754 [1804].

⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-757 [1810].

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The terrifying "devil yell" of the charging Glandelinians is frequently referred to in Darger's descriptions of battle. It was probably adapted by Darger from accounts of the Confederate army's "rebel yell," described as "an unearthly wail [which] struck fear into the hearts of the enemy." See McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 344.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. nine, pp. 9-757/9-757b [1810-1811].

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-758 [1690].

⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. nine, pp. 9-759 [1693] and 9-761 [1697].

⁹² *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-767b [1710].

⁹³ Twenty pictures in the Lerner Collection are identified by Darger's labels as scenes occurring in Norma Catherine. This includes numerous adventures of the Vivian girls, who were frequently captured there, and at least one, and perhaps several, massacres. Pictures no longer in the Lerner Collection, and therefore not catalogued as yet, may also depict events at Norma Catherine.

⁹⁴ The battle described in chapter 43 is probably the Battle of Cedernine.

⁹⁵ It is not impossible that the two fragments once formed part of a single larger whole, which was damaged, and which Darger attempted in this way to rescue.

⁹⁶ Darger may have been aware that many of the skirmishes in the Civil War were in fact fought in woods or among trees, since he often refers to trees being damaged in battle.

⁹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-758b [1692].

⁹⁸ In my catalogue of the Lerner Collection only one illustration relating to this battle is to be found. This painting has recently (2001) been acquired by the American Folk Art Museum.

⁹⁹ Inscription on picture surface.

¹⁰⁰ Darger's insistence on battlefield dead and dying, and his illustration of bizarre wounds, should not necessarily be thought of as evidence of psychopathology, since his reading of Civil War history would have familiarized him with accounts of similar horrors in the American Civil War: "Men ... lying in every conceivable position, the dead ... with their eyes wide open ... piles of dead soldiers' mangled bodies ... without heads and legs ... The scenes on this field would have cured anybody of war." Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 413.

¹⁰¹ Did Darger by any chance see the film version of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), with the marvelous reenact-

ment of the fall of the city of Atlanta? Obviously, the book (1936) by Margaret Mitchell (1900-49) would have been of enormous interest to Darger, but he makes no reference to it.

¹⁰² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-409b.

¹⁰³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 427.

¹⁰⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-294 [3502].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ In vol. twelve (unbound), ch. 34, pp. 12-463b/12-464b, Darger reviews all of the major sieges of *The Realms*, in one of the brilliant summaries of which he was capable. While the reader is generally completely lost amidst the endless detail, Darger apparently was not.

¹⁰⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-411, Introduction to chapter 20.

¹⁰⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-463b.

¹⁰⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-474.

¹¹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 12-417b and 12-418b/12-419. Somewhat later (1937), Pablo Picasso undertook a similar subject in the painting of the destruction of the town of Guernica.

¹¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-419.

¹¹² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-432.

¹¹³ Particularly strange is Darger's insertion of words such as "please" or "if you please" almost at random in his writings.

¹¹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-422b.

¹¹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-425b.

¹¹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-412.

¹¹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), ch. 26, p. 12-437b, chapter heading.

¹¹⁸ I am not necessarily maintaining that war is exclusively the product of psychological impulses, innate or acquired. Rather I am putting forward this extreme position as a context within which I want to examine Darger's subjective war.

¹¹⁹ Paul Federn, "A Dream under General Anesthesia," in *Ego Psychology and the Psychoses*, New York, 1952, pp. 97-114.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

¹²¹ "War is exciting, even if it entails risks for one's life and much physical suffering. Considering that the life of the average person is boring, routinized, and lacking in adventure, the readiness to go to war must be understood as a desire to put an end to the boring routine of daily life - and to throw oneself into adventure, the only adventure, in fact, the average person may expect to have in his life." Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 214.

¹²² Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, New York, 1966, contains a thorough account of these primitive mechanisms and their function.

¹²³ *The Realms* [vol. unknown], pp. 203-4. This passage, in which Darger soliloquizes on the anguish inspired in him by war, will be quoted repeatedly in my discussion of the psychological implications of war.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ See my essay, "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," pp. 26-35.

¹²⁶ Schizophrenic patients occasionally describe, not only their delusional conviction that the world is about to end, but their experience of living in a world that has been destroyed, and of living beyond the world's end in a lifeless and frozen realm.

¹²⁷ *The Realms* [vol. unknown], pp. 203-4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ There is in much psychotic material and, particularly in the productions of the rare psychotics of creative genius such as Adolf Wolfl, a strange predictive or anticipatory tendency, which remains unexplained.

¹³¹ "If the disaster overwhelmed such a big city as Abbieann, and spread as far as it is predicted, then it might as well be as great as if the whole of the United States had been wiped out in the same fashion." *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-316b.

¹³² *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-243 [484]. The destruction of Abbieann is explored in detail in chapter 8 below.

¹³³ An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and on the city of Nagasaki, three days later.

¹³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-319.

¹³⁵ Darger uses the term "holocaust" in *The Realms* in its original sense of devastation. See vol. eight, p. 8-317.

¹³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-328.

¹³⁷ Volume A has been given a letter so as to indicate that it has not yet been possible to determine where it fits in the sequence of volumes, and for this reason no volume number has been established for it.

¹³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3078.

¹³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 1301-1303.

¹⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-83b [3078].

¹⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-200b [3312].

¹⁴² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-194b [3300].

¹⁴³ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-246 [3402].

¹⁴⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-95 [3101].

Chapter 5

¹⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-270 [3454]. Henry presumably is referring to a Gatling gun, an early type of machine gun.

¹⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 276b [3467].

¹⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-276b [3467].

¹⁴⁸ Deaths of children in the Lincoln Asylum were a regular occurrence, indeed a few dying patients were in the hospital infirmary at all times. Particularly common were deaths from tuberculosis, pneumonia, as well as accidental injury. Henry would have been more than familiar with the death of children, including some of his friends in the asylum.

¹⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p.13-223 [3356].

¹⁵⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-263 [3440].

¹⁵¹ *The Realms* vol. thirteen, pp. 2500-2529.

¹⁵² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-308 [3529].

¹⁵³ Darger may have intended here to reflect the final hopeless days at the end of the Civil War when, after the fall the of the Confederate capital at Richmond, General Robert E. Lee with a mere 35,000 men tried desperately to hold out against the inevitable.

¹⁵⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-316/13-316b [3542-3543].

¹⁵⁵ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-317b [3544].

¹⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-317b/13-318 [3544-3545].

¹⁵⁷ Davis, to Appomattox, p. 387, quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 850.

¹⁵⁸ Personal Memoirs of General Grant, II, 489, quoted *ibid.*, pp. 849-50.

¹⁵⁹ The untitled painting illustrated here is unlikely to depict the final events of the war. However, in that it is untitled, and depicts the Christian army in elegant revolutionary costumes, it seems a worthy substitute for the missing picture, in whose existence we would wish to believe.

¹⁶⁰ This statement is made tentatively in that, because of the dispersal of so many of the Darger paintings, it always remains possible that pictures will surface which contradict this observation. At present I know of only one collage-drawing which clearly depicts one of the Henry Dargers in *The Realms* [see illustration 6.3].

¹⁶¹ See *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 50; and chapter 7 below.

¹⁶² Unfortunately, the bottom of this page has been damaged, and so the few final words of *The Realms* remain slightly obscure.

¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, New York, Penguin, 1976, p. 233.

² *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction.

³ Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," *Complete Works*, vol. 9, p. 150.

⁴ However, on one occasion only, on the first page of volume one of *The Realms*, he used a pseudonym, "H. J. Saunders original writer." It is not known why he used this name. But, on the same title page, he refers to the author of *The Realms*, volume one, as H. J. Darger. Later, as we will see, a character named Jack Saunders, pays a visit to Henry's room. See p. 236.

⁵ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-495.

⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 134. This is a very rare instance in which Darger refers to his mother, though it is doubtful whether he fully realized what he was saying here.

⁷ We must bear in mind that until 1932 Darger was not living in the room that we came to know as his. The passages we identify as descriptive of his room are identified primarily on the basis of the objects he describes, particularly the pictures, rather than the form of the room itself.

⁸ No ledger book conforming exactly to this description, with pictures of children on the back pages, was found in Henry's room.

⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3459.

¹⁰ Since as we have seen H. J. Saunders was briefly a pseudonym of Darger, the link between the two is understandably close.

¹¹ Darger's later room at 851 Webster certainly had no stove in it.

¹² *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 556. Jack's wish, that the young girl he is imagining was his "youngest sister," is obviously extremely important, and explains both his, and Darger's, feelings of depression.

¹³ These dates are provided in the document entitled "Predictions and Threats" and found in volume one, p. 295. See Prediction for December 1913.

¹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-296b/13-297 [3507-3508]. The description of this evil Darger as the general most feared by the Christian armies is totally exaggerated.

¹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-297 [3508].

¹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-294b [2649].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve, p. 12-295.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Darger's death certificate is actually made out in the name of Henry Dargarius.

²¹ Excerpted from *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 12-496b/12-499.

²² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3395.

²³ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3508. This statement, coming in the last pages of the final volume, seems to signal the end of evil General Darger's participation in *The Realms*.

²⁴ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 112.

²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 60.

²⁶ It comes as something of a surprise to learn in vol. thirteen that there is also a Glandelinian branch of the Gemini Society! The purpose of this organization seems to be to murder little girls rather than to protect them. See vol. thirteen, p. 3087, where an attack on the Vivian girls and their friends is blamed on members of the Glandelinian Gemini Society.

²⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 450. At various points in *The Realms* mention is made of Whilliam Schloeder whose nickname is George Gingigore.

²⁸ Particularly intriguing is the role of the founder of the lodge, Rodney Graves, who is invariably mentioned in tones approaching veneration. Also an important member is Thomas Newsome. Whether these individuals were members of an actual club which Darger belonged to in Chicago remains a mystery.

²⁹ The spelling Geminii is unique to this section of *The Realms*. Normally the form Gemini is used. It has not been possible to trace any references to established lodges known as the Gemini or Black Brothers Lodge in Chicago.

³⁰ The Constitution and Laws of the Gemini are discussed in detail in *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3050.

³¹ Darger's respectful reference to General Concen-tinian Aronburg is explained by a passage in *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 432, where we hear of "Adjutant general Henry Darger the main Gemini leader under the direction of his brother-in-law General Concen-tinian Aronburg." This might imply that Aronburg was married to Darger's missing sister! Or that Darger had married one of the Aronburg sisters! Neither possibility is ever mentioned in *The Realms*, and it may be that Darger did not realize that this link with General Aronburg would have any such implications.

³² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3048-3049. The long description of the meeting of the Gemini, only part of which is reproduced here, is so intensely graphic, that it seems inevitable that Darger would have depicted this event in the collage-drawings. Thus far, I know of no such picture. A remarkable encounter with the Gemini occurs in volume ten, part one, p. 808 and following, where the Vivian girls pay a visit to the mountain head-quarters of the secret organization.

³³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 60.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 62.

³⁵ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 6.

³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. five, p.216.

³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 359b.

³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 314.

³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), pp. 551-552.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 112.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 48.

⁴² *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 47.

⁴³ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-290b.

⁴⁴ *The Realms*, "Predictions and Threats," Prediction dated December 1912, vol. one, p. 295. Darger often incorporated the name Aronburg in his own name.

⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction.

⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. four, Introduction, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3507.

⁴⁸ Reference Ledger, p. 382.

⁴⁹ Reference Ledger, p. 383. At this point, Darger the newspaperman describes his encounters with the ghost of Annie Aronburg. See chapter 9 below.

⁵⁰ Reference Ledger, p. 383.

⁵¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, pp.10-249/10-249b [488-489]. Anyone with a psychologically attuned ear would respond to this "dubious confession" with reservations. In fact, we have not seen the end of this curiously ambivalent character.

⁵² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3507.

⁵³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 138.

⁵⁴ Darger provides a translation of the name Calverinia, in *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-290.

⁵⁵ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 220. The obscure reference to "purple purpose" in connection with the possession of these pictures raises interesting issues concerning the response of others to Darger's obsessions.

⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3354.

⁵⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound).

⁵⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p.12-374 [2808].

⁵⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1433.

⁶⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-87 [3085]. Marie Pickford Junction is presumably a tribute on Darger's part to the film star Mary Pickford [1893-1979].

⁶¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-215b [3342].

⁶² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-216/13-216b [3342-3343].

- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3343.
- ⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-216 [3342].
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ *The Realms* vol. ten, part one, p. 10-243 [484]. In later life, Darger's pate was not shaven, but almost hairless. He had a scatter of what appear to be very dark birthmarks on his forehead (see frontispiece).
- ⁶⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3124.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3138.
- ⁷² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-86a [3084].
- ⁷³ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-71 [3054].
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ The death of August Darger occurs in volume thirteen, p. 3356. He had made an appearance in *The Realms* in volume twelve (unbound) where he is identified as Henry's uncle and joins him in battle.
- ⁷⁶ The triumvirate of Henry Darger, Sr. and his two brothers is echoed in *The Realms* by two other related groups of three, the three Manleys, father and two sons; and Robert Vivian's three sons, one of whom, Germania, is evil and fights on the side of the Glandelinians, while the others are good Christians. Each of these groups probably reflects aspects of Darger's own family constellation, with the fraternal dissent that undoubtedly split that family apart with tragic results for Darger himself.
- ⁷⁷ See *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-424, where this signature appears on a letter dated August 12, 1914.
- ⁷⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-297 [3508].
- ⁷⁹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, quoted in Leonard Shengold, "The Boy Will Come to Nothing!", New Haven, 1993, p. 27.
- ⁸⁰ In a psychoanalytic study of the personality and writings of Charles Dickens, Leonard Shengold observes a very similar psychological mechanism at work in Dickens's creative process. "Dickens' novels are marred by his defensive need for splitting and denial ... In his novel [*Little Dorrit*] Dickens has split himself into a male alter ego and a female one: Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit, the two main sufferers from lack of love and empathy as children. They are depicted as too noble and good to be true ... considering the parental neglect and abuse to which they have been subjected. In similar, monolithic fashion, the badness that they would also have had [as any human being would] is split off and projected onto other characters who are completely villainous." Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation*, New Haven, 1989, pp. 194-5.
- ⁸¹ The creation of Bud Fisher, the famous comic strip, would have been known to Henry from about the time of his return to Chicago in 1909. The first continuously published six-day-a-week comic strip in America, it first appeared in San Francisco's *Chronicle* in 1907, but was soon nationally syndicated. I don't know of any pictorial appearances of Mutt and Jeff in the collage-drawings, despite their regular appearances in all the volumes of *The Realms*.
- ⁸² *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 258.
- ⁸³ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-36 [71-73].
- ⁸⁴ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-52 [103].
- ⁸⁵ *The Encyclopedia of American Comics: From 1897 to 1990*, ed. Ron Goulart, New York, 1990, pp. 270-71.
- ⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 333.
- ⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-119 [231].
- ⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-41 [81].
- ⁸⁹ Walter John Starring undergoes several changes of name. In *The Realms*, vol. eight, he signs a letter "General Walter Heidi Starring." In his journal, Darger lists him as Walter Joseph Starring, giving him, by accident, his own middle name, thus betraying an unconscious identification.
- ⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 260 and 306.
- ⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-177 [352]. At 5 feet, Walter Starring was just 1 inch shorter than the adult Henry Darger. Elsewhere Darger mentions "the six days growth on his [Starring's] face," and the surprising fact that he smokes a pipe, vol. seven (bound), pp. 357 and 375.
- ⁹² The first references to Starring's expedition to Abbieann occur in volume seven (bound). They occupy much of volume eight and part of volume ten, part one.
- ⁹³ The Tom Swift series, which began to appear in 1910, were the creation of a succession of writers collectively working under the pseudonym Victor Appleton. Enormously popular detective stories for boys, each book centered on a recent invention: the motor car, the flying machine, the motion picture camera, etc. That Darger may have incorporated some of the Tom Swift adventures into *The Realms* is suggested by a note inserted in volume eleven, after page 671, which states, "Started writing from Tom Swift May 12 Finished."
- ⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-257 [511].
- ⁹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-240.
- ⁹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-281.
- ⁹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-256b [510]. This passage is an ingenious adaptation of Genesis 19: 24-9.
- ⁹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 357.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 414.
- ¹⁰¹ John Bunyan (1628-88), English writer and preacher. The first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678, and the whole work in 1684. Darger's intimate familiarity with this seventeenth-century masterpiece inevitably changes our conception of the scope of his literary knowledge.
- ¹⁰² This section of borrowing and adapting Bunyan's poem occupies some forty pages of volume eight of *The Realms*.
- ¹⁰³ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-383.
- ¹⁰⁴ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, London, Penguin, 1987, p. 373.
- ¹⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-359b. These sentiments actually find expression in a letter signed "J. E." - Jack Evans?
- ¹⁰⁶ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-313.
- ¹⁰⁷ *The Journals of André Gide*, New York, 1948, trans. Justine O'Brien, entry for January 1925, p. 367.
- ¹⁰⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-167b [332].
- ¹⁰⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-585.
- ¹¹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-168 [333].
- ¹¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-583a [333].
- ¹¹² *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 8-132b/8-133 [263-264]. We find out later that Gerald was paid for this attack. "The rascally Glandelinian general Manley promised ten thousand dollars for the job of stabbing Gertrude and Penrod." "Promised to pay who?" "That boy scout Gerald Starring" - vol. eight, p. 8-193 [384].
- ¹¹³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-580b.
- ¹¹⁴ A very important guide to the part played in *The Realms* by Gerald Starring and his companions is found in Darger's Journal, in an essay entitled "Why Starring and his two companions are enemies of the Vivian Girls," p. 326. Written by an Angelinian spy, perhaps Darger himself, it attempts to explain the misapprehension the poor boys are laboring under, as well as describing their later reformation.
- ¹¹⁵ Gerald's other companion is Fred Lowden. "He is the worst of the lot" - p. 10-384b [759].
- ¹¹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-533. Amazingly, later in *The Realms*, Darger attempts to convince the reader that the attack on Gertrude and Penrod was actually carried out by Frederick Starring.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid. and 7-533b.
- ¹¹⁸ The Battle of Marcocino occurs in volume ten, part one.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid. (p. 7-533).
- ¹²⁰ Ibid.
- ¹²¹ See *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, where the entire final section of the volume is devoted to Gerald Starring's machinations against the Vivian girls and Penrod.
- ¹²² Reference Ledger, p. 276, where he is identified as "Walter Joseph Starring."
- ¹²³ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 385.
- ¹²⁴ We will come to know Gertrude Angeline, who is more formally known as Angelina Aronburg, in later chapters of this book, when we begin to examine her connection to the murdered child Annie Aronburg, her sister.
- ¹²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 7-383. I believe this romantic interlude to have been borrowed from some source in literature, and adapted by Darger.
- ¹²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), pp. 7-383/7-384.
- ¹²⁷ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), ch. 19, p. 374.
- ¹²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 375.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid.
- ¹³⁰ Strangely, Darger's library contains none of the Penrod books. All three books were illustrated by Gordon Grant. The first edition of *Penrod and Sam* was illustrated by Worth Brehm. None of the illustrations appear to have influenced Darger in any way.
- ¹³¹ The spelling of Penrod's first and middle names varies. He appears as Marcus Schoefield, and Marco Schofield.
- ¹³² It is possible that in those years there was a close bond between the Catholic churches in Canada and those in Chicago, and that Darger may have learned of French Canadian Catholics through his church.
- ¹³³ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-178 [354].
- ¹³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-205b [409].
- ¹³⁵ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-364b [729].
- ¹³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-368b [737]. At times, Darger himself is so taken in by Adeledefob's disguise, that he allows Penrod and Adeledefob to appear on stage together, forgetting for the moment that they are the same person!
- ¹³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 8-101/8-101b [198-199].
- ¹³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-373b [747].
- ¹³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 231, from an account in a Glandelinian newspaper.
- ¹⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. seven (bound), p. 502. In fact, the Rattlesnake Boy makes his appearance at least as early as volume two of *The Realms*.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴² Ibid.

- ¹⁴³ *The Realms*, vol. seven [bound], p. 428. For a discussion of the various dead and missing sisters of Angelina Aronburg, see chapter 9 below, "The Aronburg Mystery."
- ¹⁴⁴ If Gerald Starring represents a typical shadow figure, in a purely Jungian sense, then, in the same context, Radcliffe, alias Annie Aronburg, might be seen as a representative of Darger's anima.
- ¹⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, "Values in Life," *Collected Works*, 1907, pp. 17-22, an address to students of McGill University, Montreal, Canada, in 1907.
- ¹⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, "Chapter Thirty Second," pp. 383-395.
- ¹⁴⁷ Gerald Starring is Penrod's personal enemy, and many of his adventures center on attempts to capture him. But, significantly, Darger has an odd tendency to reverse their names, writing Starring when he means Penrod, and Penrod when he means Starring, a revealing slip which may imply an underlying identity, bringing together the two contrasting halves of one psyche.
- ¹⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, pp. 383-384.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵¹ Jane Mellfort is, in fact, a Christian girl scout working as a spy in this Glandelinian hospital. This fact is known to Penrod, though she does not see through his disguise.
- ¹⁵² *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, p. 384.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- ¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 388.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 386.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 387.
- ¹⁵⁷ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-369 [738].
- ¹⁵⁸ We later learn that the Vivian girls intend quite a number of additions to their family by adoption, including Jack Evans, various girl scouts, etc.
- ¹⁵⁹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-364b [729].
- ¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of the child's tendency to elaborate a fantasy family, see Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," *Collected Works*, vol. IX, pp. 237-41.
- ¹⁶¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-201b [236].
- ¹⁶² *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-204 [241].
- ¹⁶³ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 51.
- ¹⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3343.
- ¹⁶⁵ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-589.
- ¹⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, pp. 10-374 and 374b [748-749].

- ¹⁶⁷ The Song of Solomon 4: 9 and 10.
- ¹⁶⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, pp. 10-209b/10-210b [252-254]. All further quotes are to these pages.
- ¹⁶⁹ I reproduce a considerable part of this long scene between Penrod and his sister Jennie, because of its unique importance in revealing important aspects of Darger's sexual fantasies and sexual experience.
- ¹⁷⁰ Further discussion of what may be interpreted as orgasm, though Darger never uses the word, appears in *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-408 [807]. "Well then," she said blushing red but smiling at the same time, "then you saw a symptom. But my dear sisters gets that way once in a while, don't you?" They nodded. "But why does it only happen in the night time?" demanded Penrod ... Oh Penrod ... how would you like to be that way?" ... "Maybe he is without the symptoms we have?" giggled Jennie.
- ¹⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-346 [692].
- ¹⁷² *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, p. 10-208 [250].
- ¹⁷³ In classical antiquity, Roman vestal virgins who broke their vows of chastity were charged with the crime of "incestus" and punished by the Pontifex Maximus. The punishment was death.
- ¹⁷⁴ *The Realms*, vol. 10, part one, pp. 10-330 and 330b [659-660].
- ¹⁷⁵ Reference Journal, p. 429. Jack Evans is speaking.
- ¹⁷⁶ John's name is included in the list of guardian figures which appears in Darger's Journal. Darger tells us that John is "a score of years older than Jack Evans, and a great general that the enemy dread." John appears from time to time in disguise as the Christian general Sieugenary. See 3.17.
- ¹⁷⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-295 [2650].
- ¹⁷⁸ "A single-minded and direct character, the bald, middle aged Everett True was incapable of suffering fools. He couldn't put up with cant, hypocrisy, or rudeness." The comic character Everett True was created in 1905 by A. D. Condo, and under assorted titles continued to appear until 1927. "Condo, who lived in San Francisco, suffered a breakdown in the mid 1920's and his strip ended on January 13, 1927." *Encyclopedia of American Comics*, ed. Goulart, p. 123. A General Everett True is killed in battle in *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-46b.
- ¹⁷⁹ From the inscription on the picture surface.
- ¹⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-76b [3064].
- ¹⁸¹ Elsewhere we are told different, and far more significant, stories about the death and identity of Jack's parents.
- ¹⁸² *The Realms*, vol. A, p. A-171 [4008].
- ¹⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸⁴ Darger's Journal, p. 334.
- ¹⁸⁵ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-271b [542].
- ¹⁸⁶ Far from invulnerable, Jack is injured on several occasions, in particular during the final phase of the war.
- ¹⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-160 [3231].
- ¹⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, pp. 10-86 and 10-86b [171-172].
- ¹⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-97 [193].
- ¹⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-164 [3239].
- ¹⁹¹ Judges 15: 15 and 16.
- ¹⁹² *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-272 [543].
- ¹⁹³ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-271b [542].
- ¹⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-540b [2871].
- ¹⁹⁵ In Darger's Journal, there is a curious essay written by Angelina Aronburg, entitled "The beauty of the Vivian girls as described by general Jack Ambrose Evans," p. 438.
- ¹⁹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven [bound], p. 90.
- ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-179 [2438].
- ¹⁹⁹ The material referred to as "Predictions and Threats" is found in several places, twice in *The Realms*, in the first and last volumes, and also in Darger's Reference Journal. This important document is examined in detail in chapter twelve. It appears here only with reference to a single threat made by Darger against the life of the Vivian girls.
- ²⁰⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, from the version of "Predictions and Threats" which begins on p. 295.
- ²⁰¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-178b [2437] and following. All further references to the Tragedy at Brigano are from these pages.
- ²⁰² It is of psychological interest that Darger excuses Jack Evans, by placing the blame on the evil older brother of the Vivian girls, Germania Vivian.
- ²⁰³ This question concerning the legitimacy of Darger's own feelings for little girls appears in the mysterious list of questions "Found on Sidewalk" which is discussed at length in chapter 12 below.
- ²⁰⁴ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], pp. 12-202/12-202b [2484-2485]. The section in which this quote appears is entitled "Were Violet and her sisters rewarded for their patient suffering for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?"
- ²⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. twelve [unbound], p. 12-279 [2618]. This passage and the one preceding it are separated by 134 pages. It is interesting to observe how Darger reuses imagery which he finds effective, even borrowing

- whole passages from his own writing, though always with some modification and improvement.
- ²⁰⁶ This title, covering a group of related works probably produced well after the writing of *The Realms* had been completed, is my own invention. This group of works appears to be distinguished by existing independently, rather than as illustrations for the text. An important group of these drawings now resides in the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. These are reproduced in full in John M. MacGregor, *Henry Darger: Dans les Royaumes de l'irréel*, Lausanne, 1996.
- ²⁰⁷ The repeated experience of seeing little girls at his church, dressed all in white for their first Communion, must have meant a very great deal to Darger.
- ²⁰⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 7-279b [2618].
- ²⁰⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 7-278 [2616].
- ²¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹¹ It is impossible in this case to know if Henry, in writing "husband," actually made a slip, while typing, and then went on to correct it, or whether he wanted it to appear that Evans had misspoken.
- ²¹² It is essential here to remember that this odd state of affairs was precisely Darger's situation. He did not know his own mother's personal names at all. This may account for his slip in omitting the word "name."
- ²¹³ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 10-31 [61].
- ²¹⁴ *Ibid.* Curiously, Jack shows little recognition that the Vivian girls' mother who, in the story, is still very much alive is his sister. In these passages he speaks of her as if she were dead. The Empress is, however, well aware of Jack's identity. "I want to tell you something that Empress Vivian said before I left her palace ... 'Have my darling daughters love him for my sake, and teach all little boy and girl scouts to love him too, for he is my long lost brother sent back to us by Heaven'" - vol. ten, part one, p. 10-31b [62].
- ²¹⁵ This is not the final version of Evans's life history. In volume thirteen, the final volume of *The Realms*, there is a further version of the story, in which his mother and sisters are all killed by the Glandelinians, and no mention is made of a surviving sister who is the mother of the Vivian girls (p. 13-76b [3064]):
- "There in one room lay my mother dead on the floor, with her skull smashed to a pulp, and one of the brutal men stooping over her with an axe. I realized that he had murdered my mother ... There were other screams outside, and my sisters, who had been playing out in the street, had been cut down in cold blood by the Glandelinians. My father was not at home, and he was not murdered at home either ... He was one of our generals who fell mortally wounded at Cedernine."

Chapter 6

¹ In volume seven (bound), describing a romantic encounter between the boy hero Walter Starring and the girl scout heroine Gertrude Angeline, Darger introduced the term "child worship" to describe Walter's, and his own, strange attraction to little girls: "... he being a man of child worship" (p. 374).

² *The Realms*, volume one, p. 62.

³ Lines from Carroll's poem "Solitude," written when he was twenty-one years old, March 16, 1853. It is striking that Carroll at twenty-one was already mourning his lost childhood.

⁴ The notion of secret fantasy as a second life unlived was developed by Moritz Benedikt (1835-1920) of Vienna, and had a major influence on the development of psychoanalysis. To this concept Freud added the observation that much of our fantasy activity occurs and remains below the level of consciousness.

⁵ For a discussion of this process occurring in childhood, and its occasional implications for later creativity, see Robert Silvey and Stephen Mackeith, "The Paracosm: A Special Form of Fantasy," in Delmont C. Morrison, ed., *Organizing Early Experience: Imagination and Cognition in Childhood*, Amityville, N.Y., 1988.

⁶ It is precisely these idiosyncratic and private expressions of an alternate reality that form the central core and essential characteristic of the phenomenon known as Outsider Art. It is also the compulsive preoccupation with, or delusional belief in, these private other worlds that seem to serve as crucial factors separating the individual from his or her milieu and underlying an isolated existence, outside any group, as an Outsider.

⁷ The possibility of real contacts between Darger and little girls is considered in some detail in chapter 9.

⁸ Only one possible real little girl is referred to in *The Realms*. A child called Francis Schmidt (also Francis Smith) appears from time to time, along with the information that she had been a patient at St. Joseph's Hospital, suffering from an agonizing infection of her foot. While no records concerning this patient have been located, it appears probable that she was a real little girl who Darger had encountered in the hospital, and who he came to love.

⁹ See my study, "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," *Raw Vision*, 13 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 26-35.

¹⁰ It has never been possible to explain why Darger chose the name Vivian for these children of his imagination. That there were seven may, in part, be explained by an ongoing series of articles which Darger encountered in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1911, just as his story was getting underway. Entitled "Seven Noble Women," this series of articles, which began to appear on April 6-13, 1911, was followed by other "sevens" of various

kinds - Seven Famous Rides, Seven Famous Love Stories, etc. These articles appeared in the same newspaper in which Darger was following the story of the kidnapped little girl, Elsie Paroubek.

¹¹ Difficult to explain is the fact that they both continued to grow until reaching late childhood, perhaps eight or ten, rather than remaining infants. Darger was almost four when his sister was born.

¹² On several occasions Darger mentions that Hanson Vivian remarries, but his new wife plays little or no part in the story, and they have no children.

¹³ Jean Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, New York, 1976, p. 259.

¹⁴ From childhood on, Carroll adopted pseudonyms. In 1856 he settled on the name Lewis Carroll for use in all of his non-academic writings. In later life he strongly disliked any confusion between Carroll and Dodgson, refusing, as Dodgson, to admit that Lewis Carroll existed.

¹⁵ There is evidence that Carroll's attraction to children of a certain age, around seven or eight, matured somewhat as he grew older, so that in later years, he could occasionally respond to girls in their teens. This was not the case with Darger who remained fixated on the period before puberty.

¹⁶ The reason for the disruption in Dodgson's relations with the Liddell family is not known. In later years he saw Alice occasionally, but was no longer attracted to her in the same way.

¹⁷ Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, pp. 80 and 82.

¹⁸ Letter quoted in *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, 2 vols., ed. Roger Lancelyn Green, London, 1953, p. 527.

¹⁹ Numerous very experienced psychoanalysts have been drawn to the life and work of Lewis Carroll as a subject of psycho-biographical research. The most important of these is Phyllis Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll: A Psychoanalytic Study of Two Lives* (New York, 1955), which came out just after Carroll's *Diaries* became available. A highly controversial essay by Paul Schilder, "Psychoanalytic Remarks on 'Alice in Wonderland' and Lewis Carroll," appeared in *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 87 (1938), pp. 159-68. Also of interest from a psychological viewpoint are: John Skinner and Martin Grotjahn, "Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Wonderland, and about the Symbolization of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," *American Imago*, 4: 4 (1947), pp. 3-31 and 32-41; and Florence Becker Lennon, *Victoria Through the Looking Glass*, New York, 1945.

²⁰ Evelyn M. Hatch, ed., *Letters of Lewis Carroll to His Child Friends*, London, 1933.

²¹ Jackie Wullschlager, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A. A. Milne*, New York, 1995, p. 39.

²² "Today's Wonder-World Needs Alice," *New York Times*, 1962.

²³ The additional heroines referred to here are Dorothy from L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), Wendy Darling from James Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), and Charlotte, a female spider, from E. B. White's novel, *Charlotte's Web* (1952). There are, of course, a number of equally famous child heroines created by female writers; one thinks especially of the books of Frances Hodgson Burnett and Johanna Spyri. Darger made no distinction between male and female writers of children's literature, and his acquaintance with these books extended well beyond the obvious, to rarities now no longer familiar.

²⁴ This list of the Vivian sisters, with their ages indicated, comes from *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 26. Darger does not seem to realize that according to their ages at least some of the Vivian sisters would have had to be twins.

²⁵ Quoted in Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, p. 88.

²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3342.

²⁷ Quoted in Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, p. 95.

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-373b. The chief forest ranger is speaking here about the Vivian girls.

²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-287 (2634). This passage from *The Realms* was published for the first time in *Artists of Vision and Purpose*, the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name, held at the Art Gallery of Carlton College, Northfield, Minnesota, April 1-May 5, 1994.

³⁰ Michael Bonesteel, in his book, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000, pp. 30-31, points to a convincing source for this image. He illustrates a scene from the 1925 film *Little Annie Rooney*, starring Mary Pickford, in which Annie is seen "peeking out from the inside of a sewer pipe." Not only is this still from the film convincing as a source for Darger's picture, but it also demonstrates that Darger occasionally went to the movies.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-288 (2636).

³² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7-287b (2635).

³³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 7-287b/7-288 (2635-2636).

³⁴ *The Journals of André Gide*, trans. Justin O'Brien, New York, 1947, vol. 1, p. 38.

³⁵ In fact, numerous fragments of earlier material reaching back into Dodgson's childhood were being incorporated into the narrative spontaneously emerging on this occasion. See Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll: A Psychoanalytic Study of Two Lives*. In Carroll's case we are fortunate in having early writing extending back to 1843, when he was eleven. See *The Rectory Magazine*, Austin, 1975.

³⁶ Examining the situation from a psychoanalytic point of view, the perceptive biographer Jean Gattegno comments: "These are ideal conditions for daydreaming, and also (perhaps it is the same thing) for the confessions of the analyst's couch. Though it may not have been the Unconscious itself talking, certainly the major barriers were removed ... it was Alice who was the analyst, and at that stage, the object of a powerful transference." Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, p. 20.

³⁷ Quoted *ibid.* Carroll claimed to have begun the process of transcription on the night of July 4, 1862, after he got home from his outing with Alice and her sisters. His illustrations for the manuscript took a good deal of time. The unique copy was not sent to Alice until November 26, 1864.

³⁸ In 1886 Carroll decided, with Alice's (now Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves) permission, to publish this original handwritten version in a facsimile edition. This publication is now readily available: *Alice's Adventures Under Ground: A Facsimile of the Original Lewis Carroll Manuscript*, Ann Arbor, 1964. All quotes from Alice used here are from this original manuscript, and not from the later published book.

³⁹ Although children have occasionally had the opportunity of seeing Darger's illustrations, no little girls have ever seen the text of *The Realms*. It is therefore difficult to comment on how they might respond to Darger's writings.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 138.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² In 1863, Carroll sent the manuscript to a friend, George MacDonald. He, and his children, urged him to consider publishing the manuscript. Various other friends saw the manuscript and added their voices to the chorus urging publication. The book was finally published by Macmillan, the publishers for Oxford University.

⁴³ The final version of the story, *Alice in Wonderland*, which appeared in 1865, is almost twice as long as the manuscript version prepared for Alice Liddell. The illustrations for this published version were executed by the well-known illustrator John Tenniel at Carroll's request.

⁴⁴ Lewis Carroll, *Alice Adventures Under Ground*, pp. 62-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ In a 1938 essay that raises the issue of the appropriateness of Carroll's writings for children, psychoanalyst Paul Schilder remarks: "This is a world of cruelty, destruction, and annihilation. Alice, constantly threatened, still emerges bland and smiling ... Carroll appears to the writer of this essay as a particularly destructive writer ... We may ask whether such a literature might not increase destructive attitudes in children beyond the measure which is desirable. There is very

little in *Alice in Wonderland* as in *Through the Looking Glass* which leads from destruction to construction. There is very little love and tenderness, and little regard for the existence of others." "Psychoanalytic Remarks on *Alice in Wonderland* and Lewis Carroll," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 87 (1938), pp. 159-68.

⁴⁷ Letter dated April 7, 1891. Reproduced in Thomas Hinde, *Lewis Carroll: Looking Glass Letters*, New York, 1991, p. 147.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 11-72/11-72b [2189-2190].

⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 397.

⁵⁰ Darger's book collection included children's books published in the late teens and early twenties of the twentieth century, proving that he was still reading such adventure stories during the time that he was writing *The Realms*.

⁵¹ This, and the quotations which follow, are to be found in *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 397-401.

⁵² "I have, however, a floating idea of writing a sort of sequel to *Alice* ..." Letter to his publisher, Alexander Macmillan, dated August 24, 1866. Reproduced in Morton N. Cohen, ed., *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*, New York, 1982, p. 32.

⁵³ For a time, the small notebooks composing the final half of *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House* were believed, because of their consecutive volume numbers, to be part of Darger's autobiography, *The Story of My Life*.

⁵⁴ The title is, in part, my invention. If a title page eventually surfaces we will be able to employ Darger's title for the work instead. Although the number of pages, and volumes, might be thought to imply a work of at least half the length of *The Realms*, the fact that *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House* is written out in longhand in very large script, and on small pages, means that it is a much shorter work, which might be published in a single volume were there sufficient interest.

⁵⁵ At present, the most that can be said with certainty is that volume ten of *The Realms* was written in 1929 or shortly thereafter. This is so because of references it contains to the Great Depression, and "the Crash of the world's money market" (see p. 10-99 [197]). The first nine volumes were therefore written between 1911 and 1929, at an approximate rate of one volume per two years. If the remaining six volumes required about the same time to write, we can logically assume a completion date some time around 1938 or 1939. It therefore seems possible that the writing of *Crazy House* followed immediately upon the completion of *The Realms*.

⁵⁶ Evidence for the date of volume one of *Crazy House* is provided by a letter found in Darger's room. Dated May 1939, it is addressed to a periodical *Ave Maria*, a Catholic home weekly, published in Indiana. The letter

concerns the practice of refusing Communion to children. Almost the entire content of that letter was then incorporated, with modifications, into volume one of the manuscript of *Crazy House*. It now purports to be a letter written by the Archbishop of New York to Father John Casey, a character in the story (see vol. one, p. 427b-473). Work on the sequel would most likely have begun some time before May 1939. The date is additionally confirmed by a piece of newspaper tucked in between the pages of volume one, following p. 614, which bears the date Tuesday, May 16, 1939.

⁵⁷ Ultimately, detailed scholarly investigation of *Crazy House* will probably be left to another investigator, since it represents massively different psychological and aesthetic problems. We return briefly to it in chapter 11 below.

⁵⁸ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5438.

⁵⁹ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 1575.

⁶⁰ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5438.

⁶¹ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5432.

⁶² The story Darger tells in this book is a variant of a story told in volume eleven of *The Realms*. There too the Vivian girls are confronted with a demon-possessed house, and for some fifty pages they struggle with the evil spirits by which it is possessed. The tricks of the demons in this earlier version are far less violent and, though frightening to the children, are more in the nature of pranks. The demons are finally driven out when the Vivian girls assist in the performance of a Mass in every room in the house. See *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 141-195.

⁶³ Angelina Aronburg had become the eighth member of the group toward the end of *The Realms*. She too is present in *Crazy House*.

⁶⁴ In the early part of his story Darger's lifelong obsession with fire centers on arson. His description of children tied to beds and burned to death in fires deliberately set raises a number of new issues concerning his possible activities in Chicago. See *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 2345.

⁶⁵ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5305. The similarity between this "fire phenomenon" and the adventure with the "hands of fire" in *The Realms* is noticed by the children. "Remember the possessed house we were in in Calvernia? We conquered that and the phenomena there were worse than in this house, and they certainly were not caused by angels." *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5372. The illustration of the same, or perhaps a similar, event is set by Darger *At McCauls Run, Coller Junction* where the Vivian girls saves strangling children from phenomenon of frightful shape. It would seem that some of Darger's favorite events in *The Realms* are repeated in *Crazy House*.

⁶⁶ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5442.

⁶⁷ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5476. Henry's use of the word "rape" is surprising. On one occasion at the end of his life he came, very upset, to Nathan Lerner and announced that he had been raped by a beautiful seventeen-year-old Italian girl. When questioned by Nathan, Henry explained that he had been cornered in the vestibule of his house, thrust up against the wall, and his wallet had been stolen. Nathan loaned him money to get by until his next social security check. Whatever had occurred, it is unlikely that Henry, then in his seventies, had been raped.

⁶⁸ *Crazy House*, vol. one, p. 5448. A possible model for Darger's description of this murder is found in accounts of the final murder perpetrated by Jack the Ripper, that of Mary Jane Kelly, which equals in violence the death of little Pauline. Interestingly, in that murder too the heart was missing and never found. However, the post-mortem report containing the fact of the missing heart only surfaced in 1987. Curiously, at this point in time Darger was reading Dickens, and includes the characters of Fagan and Sikes (Sykes) from *Oliver Twist* in his story. He also mentions Thackeray.

⁶⁹ The picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was originally part of a four-panel composition. At some point the first two scenes were split off from the horizontal strip, an example of the incredible callousness with which Darger's paintings have occasionally been handled.

⁷⁰ *Crazy House*, vol. two, p. 6357. In the very different version of the haunted house story told in *The Realms*, vol. eleven, no picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is involved.

⁷¹ These measurements do not conform to the surviving picture.

⁷² *Crazy House*, vol. two, p. 6370.

⁷³ As far as I know, no second version of the icon exists. If such a picture were to surface, it might conform even more closely to the written text.

⁷⁴ The fundamental book on the photographs of Lewis Carroll, and the study that initially established his place in the history of photography, is Helmut Gernsheim's brilliant work, *Lewis Carroll Photographer*, London, 1949. See also Brassai, "Lewis Carroll photograph ou L'Autre Côté du miroir," in *L'Herne: Lewis Carroll*, no. 17, Paris, 1971, pp. 99-109.

⁷⁵ Carroll's many biographers have been ill equipped for this critical task. Helmut Gernsheim makes a number of astute remarks about the importance of the drawings in the context of Victorian aesthetic judgements, suggesting the need for a reevaluation of Carroll's drawings in terms of the vastly different taste of the twentieth century.

⁷⁶ As a boy of thirteen, Carroll undertook the editing, and most of the writing and illustrating, of a series of family "magazines." Most of these private productions still exist in manuscript, and have now been made available in facsimile editions. *The Rectory Magazine*, Austin, 1975, and *The Rectory Umbrella and Mischmasch*, New York, 1971.

⁷⁷ Alice Hargreaves (née Liddell), Captain Caryl Hargreaves, "Alice's Recollections of Carrollian Days," *The Cornhill Magazine*, July 1932.

⁷⁸ He permitted publication of the handwritten text and drawings of *Alice's Adventures Underground* only in 1886, long after he had created the private edition for Alice Liddell.

⁷⁹ Sadly, Carroll showed some of his drawings to the Victorian critic John Ruskin (1819-1900), who, given his limited academic taste, informed him "that he had not enough talent to make it worth his while to devote much of his time to sketching." It is fortunate that Darger was never exposed to "informed opinion" concerning his artistic abilities.

⁸⁰ Letter to Mary E. Mannors, December 5, 1885. Reproduced in *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*, p. 158.

⁸¹ To the present I have found no reference to Lewis Carroll or to either of the Alice books in Darger's writings. His library did not contain them. I do not consider this a final opinion on this problem, since it seems almost impossible that he would not have known them.

⁸² This drawing is dated "October 7/75" and inscribed "Gertrude Chataway."

⁸³ Letter to Gertrude Chataway, dated January 1, 1892, reproduced in *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*, p. 215.

⁸⁴ Darger not only imagined photographs of massacres and of the sufferings of the Vivian girls, but he also thought of making use of motion picture cameras to film them. He occasionally mentions movie actors such as Charles Chaplin, and we know that he was enamored of the child star Shirley Temple. More important, he often speaks in his writings of the possibility of depicting the Vivian girls in motion pictures, though usually with an awareness that the subject matter of *The Realms* might present problems, since it is usually the more violent scenes which he imagines being filmed. "Haters of children, the Glandelinians treated her and her sisters with a cruelty which would take millions of dollars to show in pictures, or to have acted for moving pictures ... All child slaves reported unable to work were slaughtered in a manner that would have been too shocking to put in moving pictures." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3499-3500. How long will we have to wait before the adventures of the Vivian girls do appear in the cinema?

⁸⁵ Although Darger does not seem ever to have possessed a camera, as a modern man living in America he was aware not only of cameras, but of books of photographs of a questionable nature. In *The Realms*, vol. eleven, he conceived of a book illustrating the more terrifying experiences of the Vivian girls, with pictures of the sadistic tortures they endured, and the wounds they received. "What's in that book?" "Photographic pictures of the very experiences that are listed there. Mind you, not drawings or paintings. Pictures taken by a camera." The book was so big that everybody could look through it at the same time. "Violet and her sisters explained the pictures to those who had never seen them, and there were over five hundred of them, and it took quite a while before it was over." *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 185-186.

⁸⁶ Self-taught and described as an amateur, Carroll was an amateur only in the sense that he did not earn his living from photography. The seriousness of his involvement and the extent and quality of his surviving work, compare favorably with any of the major figures in the history of this art. His case is only one among many which make evident the total meaninglessness of the term "self-taught" as a special category within the history of art. Carroll was not only extremely well informed about the English art of his day, but he was close to a large number of the more important painters, and was a frequent visitor to their studios. His quarters at Oxford were decorated, like Darger's in Chicago, with paintings and illustrations most of which depicted little girls.

⁸⁷ Carroll also photographed adults on occasion, but it is upon his photographs of children, primarily little girls, that his reputation is based.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hudson, *Lewis Carroll*, pp. 87-8.

⁸⁹ Brassai, "Lewis Carroll photograph ou L'Autre côté du miroir," p. 108.

⁹⁰ Journal entry, quoted in Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, p. 86.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

⁹² C. L. Dodgson, Introduction to *Pillow-Problems*, New York, 1958.

⁹³ Letter to Gertrude Thompson, quoted in Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll Photographer of Children: Four Nude Studies*, New York, 1978, p. 30.

⁹⁴ Letter dated September 27, 1893, to Mrs. C. F. Moberly Bell, in *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*, p. 247.

⁹⁵ Journal entry for July 1879, quoted in Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll Photographer*, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Letter to Gertrude Thomson, February 27, 1893, in *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*, p. 235. Gernsheim suggested that Carroll photographed boys "only when they were pretty in a girlish way." Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll Photographer*, p. 18.

⁹⁷ See Cohen, *Lewis Carroll Photographer of Children*, which reproduces four of the surviving photographs in color. Helmut Gernsheim seems to have been unaware of the surviving nude photographs. A purist, he had difficulty with Carroll's interest in coloring photographs, and his taste for combining painting and photography. See Gernsheim, "Retouching and Colouring," p. 31.

⁹⁸ See the painted portrait of Beatrice Hatch, plate one, in Cohen, *Lewis Carroll Photographer of Children*.

⁹⁹ The technique used in producing this painted photograph was unusually complex, involving a photograph printed on emulsion applied to a curved piece of glass, with oil highlights added to the back surface. Beneath, there is a second piece of curved glass with a landscape applied in oil paint. See Cohen, "Technical Notes" in *Lewis Carroll Photographer of Children*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Another striking parallel to Darger's concealed life and art is provided by the recently discovered work of photographer and maker of dolls Morton Bartlett (1909-92). Born in Chicago, Bartlett was orphaned at the age of eight. (The loss of a parent in early childhood, in particular the mother, seems to be a traumatic experience shared by many individuals who go on to develop an emotional and/or sexual fixation on little girls in later life.) At the age of twenty-seven, Bartlett began to produce half-size, anatomically correct, models of little girls. Carefully painted, equipped with naturalistic hair, eyes, and female genitals, and dressed in outfits handmade by the artist, these children accord to a remarkable degree with Darger's idealized vision of perfect little girls.

If Darger borrowed his figures from advertising, particularly children's fashion illustrations, Bartlett's primary inspiration may initially have been realistic commercial store dummies, produced for advertising displays of children's clothing. His creations differ from such standardized figures in being far more realistic, individualized, and anatomically complete. Working in his home in Boston, over a period of some thirty years, the markedly obsessional Bartlett produced twelve perfect pre-adolescent and adolescent girls. Three figures of small boys, recognizable self-portraits, depict the artist at approximately the age at which he lost his parents. It would appear that part of his developing personality remained fixated at that period of his life, with girls of a more or less similar age accepted as compelling objects of erotic interest. Like Darger, Bartlett seems to have kept this aspect of his life secret, though an article on the technical procedures involved in doll-making, illustrated with photographs by the artist, was published in 1962.

Morton Bartlett also offers significant parallels with Lewis Carroll in that his dolls served over the years as models for a series of over a hundred carefully staged and disturbingly intimate black-and-white photographs, only one of which depicts one of the dolls, a nubile adolescent, in a state of complete undress. A profoundly private person, Harvard drop-out Bartlett was self-employed as a photographer's assistant and later a printer's agent. He never married, and had no children of his own. The dolls were discovered at his death, wrapped in newspaper and stored in individual wooden boxes. Since no written material accompanied them, nothing is known about the function of the dolls in Bartlett's life, or the role they may have played in his fantasies. Only one tantalizing statement by the artist throws light on his secret creation. "My hobby is sculpting in plaster. Its purpose is that of all proper hobbies - to let out urges that do not find expression in other channels." This brief discussion of Bartlett's dolls and photographs is based on the private publication by Marion Harris et al., *Family Found: The Lifetime Obsession of Self-Taught Artist, Morton Bartlett*, New York, 1994.

¹⁰¹ Obviously, the identification of a body of work, writings, paintings, environments, or costumes, etc., as art, depends upon its eventual discovery and recognition. Yet a considerable portion, perhaps most, of Outsider creativity escapes discovery, crossing the consciousness of its sole creator like a comet in the night.

¹⁰² In most instances we can assume that at least some of the nude photographs he made at any one sitting were shared with the parents of the child model.

¹⁰³ See chapter 1 above, where a witness to these events reports that, when told of the discovery of his work, Darger said that all of it should be thrown away.

¹⁰⁴ These are only the simplest and preliminary requirements, among many. Very few externalized images, however fantastic, result in art.

¹⁰⁵ While I have avoided any examination of Carroll's writings, the contribution of repressed aggression is everywhere present in both of the Alice books, as well as in his ambivalent relations with little girls, as revealed in his letters to them.

¹⁰⁶ One of the great pleasures of reading Darger systematically is that on occasion it is possible to place an illustration at the point in the text where it obviously belongs.

¹⁰⁷ A significant parallel is provided by Ancient Egyptian *ka* statues, hidden within the confines of the *serdab*, and dedicated to seeing rather than being seen.

¹⁰⁸ I would like to acknowledge the source of this observation, in a notebook on the collage-drawings, assembled by the late Daniel Luebbe while he was working on the drawings. Through the kindness of Mrs. June Luebbe, this notebook is now in my possession, and I make use of its observations with permission.

¹⁰⁹ As we know Hanson Vivian's first wife and their little girl are killed by the storm which opens *The Realms*. That Hanson Vivian remarried is never clearly indicated, but the occasional references to the Vivian princesses' aunt would suggest that he did.

¹¹⁰ The precise identity of these rare babes in arms, clearly not younger siblings of the Vivian children, is not explained. However, in volume eleven, chapter 25, a baby is found lying on a bed between its dead parents. This baby is adopted by the Vivian girls. In general, Darger, like Carroll, displays little interest in babies.

¹¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part two, p. 197b (393).

¹¹² This slight modification of Proust's chapter title, "Seascape, with Frieze of Girls," is used to remind us of how sexual ambivalence, and the need for disguise in literature, can easily result in little boys being transformed, in order to protect the overly innocent reader, into little girls.

¹¹³ In that these compositions employ all of the enlargements which Darger had made over the years (as well as figures of a size larger than can be explained by his usual procedure of photographic enlargement), they date to the 1950s, or later, when his entire energy was being devoted to the making of the collage-drawings.

¹¹⁴ A set of these later pictures is owned by the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, and is reproduced in the catalogue of their collection, John M. MacGregor, *Henry J. Darger. Dans les Royaumes de l'irréel*, Lausanne, 1996. The majority of these collage-drawings are approximately 3 feet high x 12 feet long.

¹¹⁵ The parallel I am suggesting here between play and creativity is by no means intended to be derogatory. Continuity between these forms of activity is well known to psychoanalysts, with the ability to play representing an essential element in the origins and development of artistic productivity of adults. See Phyllis Greenacre, "Play in Relation to Creative Imagination," in *Emotional Growth: Psychoanalytic Studies of the Gifted and a Great Variety of Other Individuals*, vol. 2, New York, 1971, pp. 555-74.

Chapter 7

¹ Novalis [Friedrich von Hardenberg] (1772–1801), *Werke und Briefe*, Munich, Winkler, 1962.

² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 36.

³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 45.

⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 172.

⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 45.

⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 43.

⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 160.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Reproduced in Sigfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*, New York, Bollingen, 1962, p. 308.

¹⁰ The animal described here is the famous "sorcerer" of the cave of Les Trois Frères.

¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 7-289/7-289b.

¹² See R. Lullies and M. Hirmer, *Greek Sculpture*, London, 1957, p. 59, figure 2, reconstruction drawing of the so-called Typhon Pediment, from the Old Temple of Athene on the Athenian Acropolis, Athens.

¹³ Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, New York, 1957, p. 236. Harrison mentions an unexpected link between child and snake, "Snake and child to the primitive mind are not far asunder; the Greek peasant of to-day has his child quickly baptized, for till baptized he may at any moment disappear in the form of a snake" (p. 133).

¹⁴ Winged phallus, classical Roman, reproduced in Richard Payne Knight and Thomas Wright, *A History of Phallic Worship*, reprint, New York, 1992.

¹⁵ Darger would not have had much experience of Chinese dragons. It is therefore significant that his Blengins tend to have five claws, the traditional number used exclusively for Imperial Dragons. The earliest of all Chinese dragons appears on a Neolithic Yang shao vessel, dating to the mid-third millennium BC. A snake with two legs, it is an important hybrid ancestor of the Blengin.

¹⁶ Darger's familiarity with dragons is revealed by his use of a very traditional picture of a dragon in a truly evil context, that is, on the "Gargolian flag of Glandelinia." True dragons are described in *The Realms* as dwelling at one time in Glandelinia.

¹⁷ The mythological constructs of Outsiders invariably involve cosmogonic speculation and the creation of myths of origin.

¹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 29.

¹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 45.

²⁰ The humanized animals of comic strips, cartoons, and films may represent an adaptation of the animal hybrid to modern life and needs.

²¹ It was the occurrence of unexplained parallels between an arcane mythological image found in an obscure Greek papyrus in the Bibliothèque National, Paris, and the delusions of a paranoid schizophrenic in his care, which initially inclined Carl G. Jung to postulate a collective unconscious (a potential and shared stratum, or fundamental core, of inherited knowledge in the depths of the human mind). For an account of this strangely compelling incident, see C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9: 1, Princeton, 1959, pp. 50–53.

²² I have given the essay "What Are Blengiglomenean Serpents?" the short title "Treatise on Blengins," in order to refer to it in brief. This short title is not Darger's.

²³ The set of pictures has no overall title, and I have, therefore, given it the name "Pictures of Blengins" so that it is possible to refer to these works as a group. It is not certain exactly how many of these illustrations of Blengins exist, since some had been sold and were no longer in the room.

²⁴ The group includes several standard sizes of pictures executed on identifiable types of paper. Since Darger's supplies of paper varied tremendously over time, it is probable that a group of drawings, all done on one kind of paper, belongs to a short phase during which this particular paper stock was available to him. All of the drawings are related in style, depicting a Blengin or small group of Blengins isolated in a simple landscape setting.

²⁵ The majority of illustrations in this set have tack holes in all four corners, indicating that Darger may have used them, at one time, as part of the decor of his room.

²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 35.

²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 34.

³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 35.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 4, p. 32.

³² In writing this chapter I attempt to provide a sense of the many types of Blengin that exist, and the elaborate system of classification that was invented by Darger to describe them, but without overwhelming the reader with the whole of the "Treatise" presented in volume one, chapter 4. It is to be hoped that an enterprising publisher will eventually produce a small book reproducing the complete set of Blengin illustrations and the matching treatise by Darger.

³³ A curious parallel to this possibility of shared fantasy is provided by the popular children's story *My Father's Dragon*, by Ruth Stiles Gannett, New York, 1948. This story, and the sequels, *Elmer and the Dragon*, and *The Dragons of Blueand*, would have appealed immensely to Darger, but there is no evidence he knew of them.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ While the history of adult scientific involvement with prehistoric animals can readily be traced, it is less easy to establish the onset of, and motivation for, children's interest in dinosaurs. When were the first books about prehistoric animals written for children? The flood of specially prepared children's books on dinosaurs sets in only in the 1950s. One of the first was Roy Chapman Andrews, *All About Dinosaurs*, New York, 1953. I would like to thank Elizabeth Overmyer of the Bay Area Library and Information System for her research efforts in investigating this topic.

³⁷ "Paleontologists, even behavior scientists, seem to be at a loss to account for the hold dinosaurs have on the psyche. It must be elemental, for children are the ones most likely to become enamored of dinosaurs, and at an early age. Most children go through a dinosaur phase ... John E. Schowalter, professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the Yale University Child Study Center, was surprised a few years ago to find that little effort had been made to explain why children love and identify with dinosaurs. He conducted a poll of nursery-school teachers and collected observations from parents and his own psychotherapy practice. He found the fascination with dinosaurs not only common but generally healthy. Those children most interested tended to be the brighter, more imaginative ones." John Noble Wilford, *The Riddle of the Dinosaur*, New York, 1987, pp. 77–8. It is probable that many of the psychological factors inspiring children's intense interest in extinct reptiles play a part in Darger's obsessional involvement with Blengins.

³⁸ Darger was certainly aware of dinosaurs as a source of pictorial elements useful in the design of Blengins. His picture collections included clippings from comic books which depicted dinosaurs in conflict with humans. These mythical encounters appeared in the early 1930s in comics depicting Tarzan the Terrible, adapted from Chicago-born Edgar Rice Burroughs, and drawn by Rex Mason.

³⁹ I raise the issue of a possible connection between Blengins and dinosaurs in Darger's mind and experience because it may also have influenced his pictorial rendering of Blengins. It is not impossible that Darger's obsession with huge imaginary beasts in the 1930s was inspired, at least in part, by the dinosaurs at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition of 1933–34, which he would certainly have visited. One of the most impressive exhibitions at the fair was the Sinclair Refining Company dinosaur exhibit. "Visitors to the

Sinclair dinosaur exhibit in 1933 were transported back through time hundreds of millions of years, as they passed through the artificial rock grotto to emerge in a facsimile of the Mesozoic era. This human-made prehistoric world was both exciting and educational ... six great effigies ruled over the Chicago based prehistoric world. [They] virtually came alive, powered by electric motors implanted in their innards." See Donald F. Glut, *The Dinosaur Scrapbook*, Secaucus, N.J., 1980, p. 35. As with his refashioning of the Civil War, Darger preferred to invent his own prehistory, and therefore chose to create imaginary giant animals only minimally connected to those that had once reigned on earth.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 168.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 146.

⁴² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 50.

⁴³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 162.

⁴⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 45.

⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 142.

⁴⁶ This reference to "the first volumes," occurring on p.15 of volume one, provides clear proof that material produced late in the writing of *The Realms* was introduced at a much later stage into volume one.

⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 151.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 779.

⁴⁹ The picture is also unusual in that it has a note on it, written by Darger, which indicates the precise location in *The Realms* of the scene he was illustrating. "See chapter two, vol. four."

⁵⁰ The small size of the tracings of military groupings, with their tiny individual figures, probably indicates that this drawing is rather earlier than the majority of the larger collage-drawings. It may date close in time to the illusionistic collages, with their masses of cut-out groups of men, and their blue rather than gray uniforms.

⁵¹ This is a reference to the enormously successful song "Puff the Magic Dragon," written by Peter Yarrow and Leonard Lipton, and popularized by Peter, Paul, and Mary in 1963.

⁵² One of the odd characteristics of the Vivian girls is that each time they encounter a Blengiglomenean serpent, they first react with terror and amazement, and only later realize it is one of the creatures who they know perfectly well from experience.

⁵³ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 268.

⁵⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 45.

⁵⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 43.

⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 44. Interestingly, at this point in his text, Darger links these mythological, but theologically existent creatures to two works of literature

which he seems to have known, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Dante's *Inferno*, in which similar demonic monsters dwell.

⁵⁷ See volume thirteen, ch. 4. Located at the end of volume thirteen, this conclusion, describing the surrender of General Manley and his armies, is presently believed to represent the end, not only of the Glandco-Angelinian war, but the conclusion of the final volume of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. Until the proper sequence of all fifteen volumes has been decisively established, and all random pages accounted for, this assumption must remain somewhat uncertain.

⁵⁸ This brief passage, almost certainly a later addition to *The Realms*, occurs in volume one, p. 50. No method of determining the date of its composition is available at present, though it was certainly in place by 1932 when the books appear to have been bound.

⁵⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 50.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² For more detailed discussion of religious and moral questions, see chapter 12 below, which deals with Darger's relationship with God.

⁶³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 31.

⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 779.

⁶⁵ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 264.

⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 40.

⁶⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 43.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* As far as I know, Darger never drew a detailed rendering of all of these anatomical structures in the mouth of a Blengin.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ I have not, as yet, been able to discover where in *The Realms* this event actually occurs. The account, added at a later date to volume one, is merely a reference to an event occurring at Phelantenburg, which we assume must be described elsewhere, and at greater length, somewhere in *The Realms*.

⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 172. It is clear that Darger intended to finish the sentence, as it had begun, with the masculine pronoun "his." But, given the content of the sentence, with its obvious sexual implications, he suddenly substituted "hers."

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ At this point we leave the field of pure history, entering the difficult area of psychological and psycho-historical reconstruction. The reader must be aware that speculation is involved in this reconstruction of events for which there is not sufficient historical evidence. However, numerous, trained and highly qualified experts in the field of psychiatry and psycho-

analysis have commented repeatedly on the possibility that Darger was sexually abused, and that his writings and images reflect such experience. Detailed examination of conditions current in the Lincoln Asylum during the years of Darger's stay tend to support such informed speculation. (We will return to this problem in chapter 10.)

⁷⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 166.

⁷⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 42.

⁷⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 44.

⁷⁷ I believe that Darger's own adolescent experiences of sexual activity, both with other boys and with adults, in the institution in Lincoln are influencing every detail of the story at this point. A psychoanalyst with extensive experience of cases involving sexual exploitation in childhood, and its ramifications in the adult, would be able to reconstruct Darger's early experience quite precisely. See Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation*, New Haven, Conn., 1989.

⁷⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 43. I don't think Darger ever drew a Whipple Blengiglomenean serpent. Considering that the lance, in the bigger creatures, is nearly "thirty feet long and about half a foot wide," an encounter with it by a little child would be traumatic indeed. This trauma in Darger's case could be the source of his obsessional involvement with the enormous size of Blengins, and especially his emphasis on the extraordinary length of their tails.

⁷⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 165. In *The Realms*, vol. two, chapter 42 is entitled, "Hydrophobia, and how the Blengiglomenean creature stops its ravaging fury." It contains a long description of a child suffering from lockjaw (tetanus). Her imminent death is avoided when she is provided with medicine obtained from a Blengiglomenean serpent.

⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 44.

⁸¹ In elaborating on the remarkably beneficial, and even morally uplifting effects of intimate contact with Blengiglomenean serpents, Darger may have been unconsciously attempting to rationalize or justify sexual assaults on innocent children, and originally on himself, by inventing extraordinarily positive results stemming from passive experience. The invention of such rationalized benefits is common in children who have been sexually exploited by adults.

⁸² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 172.

⁸³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 165.

⁸⁴ The case records from the Lincoln Asylum confirm these observations in greater detail.

⁸⁵ Another Outsider artist, Dwight Mackintosh, whose work I have had the opportunity of studying in detail, was also placed as a boy in institutions for the retarded. His experience of group homosexual activity at an early

age massively influenced his art for the rest of his life. See John M. MacGregor, *Dwight Mackintosh: The Boy who Time forgot*, Oakland, Cal., 1992.

⁸⁶ A rare exception is the drawing *Attack of Tuskorharians on Glandelinians* in the Outsider Collection and Archive, London (illustration 7.11).

⁸⁷ It is necessary that the reader be aware that the evidence supporting the hypothesis that Darger's Blengins evolved, from full dragon-like beasts, through dragons with human heads and faces, and dragons with a human head, trunk, and arms on a snakelike body, and culminating in child-form Blengins whose body is fully that of a child, is tenuous at best. The documentation is complicated by the fact that Darger's "Treatise on Blengins" was a later addition to volume one of *The Realms*. There is no evidence presently enabling us to date the set of "Pictures of Blengins," though it is fairly certain that the "Treatise" and the set of "Pictures of Blengins" were executed at the same time, and relatively early. The child-bodied Blengins, which are introduced for the first time in the large collage-drawings, in that they depend on tracings of photographic enlargements, have to have been made in the late 1940s and the 1950s, and are therefore a late creation.

⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 41.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 29.

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 37. Darger introduces the term "human headed Blengin" to refer to all Blengins with partial or complete human bodies. I have introduced the term child Blengins, which is not used by Darger, to refer exclusively to Blengins with complete child bodies.

⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 29.

⁹² *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 42.

⁹³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 152.

⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 166.

⁹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 169.

⁹⁶ It would be of great interest to discover the source from which Darger has borrowed this passage. That it is so easily distinguishable from Darger's own writing is reassuring. It is probable that he used such techniques of literary collage fairly frequently, whenever he encountered suitable passages, persons, or events, which seemed to conform in some way to his world.

⁹⁷ One composition has a total of eighty-two figures.

⁹⁸ The point of attachment of the tail is best seen in profile views. Here too we may be encountering a reference to additional aspects of Darger's adolescent sexual experience, perhaps explaining his obsessional preoccupation with large tails.

⁹⁹ While a Freudian interpretation of all of these animal horns as phallic may seem far-fetched, the addition of a ball to the tip of each horn certainly enhances the symbolic link with male genitals.

¹⁰⁰ A child's first experience of movement through space, of crawling, and finally of walking unassisted, must be experienced with all the exhilaration and intensity with which an adult experiences so called "out of body experiences" or dreams of flying.

¹⁰¹ In volume thirteen, p. 13-17a, Darger describes the Vivian girls as being "startled by a roaring and droning noise that is made by aeroplanes, and looking up toward one certain hill, saw ten beautiful Blengiglomenean serpents flying in the sky above the hill."

¹⁰² Darger would have been aware of Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of winged figures and of his experiments with wings added to the body as a means of flying.

¹⁰³ I want to stress that the term introduced here to refer to a specific group of large Dargers, the largest he ever did, is my own invention, and is not used by Darger. The majority of these large works possess titles relating them to events occurring at "Jennie Richee." The reason for the very large number of pictures associated with this location remains unexplained at present.

¹⁰⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 49-50. It comes as something of a surprise, not usually recognized by the inexperienced reader of *The Realms*, that the end of the war, and the children's return to normal life, is first described here.

¹⁰⁵ These speeches are found on the surface of an untitled painting. Darger used cartoon captions contained in balloons to indicate what the various children and Blengins were saying to one another.

¹⁰⁶ In Darger's later writings, which deal with real children in Illinois, Blengins do not appear. The chief excitement is provided not by war but by violent tornadoes and other storms.

¹⁰⁷ 24 x 107 inches. The picture, one of Darger's finest, is now in the Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York. It was exhibited in the Los Angeles County Museum show "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art." It is reproduced in the catalogue of that exhibition, plate 228, pp. 260-61.

¹⁰⁸ Clearly this sensuous Blengin follows unconsciously in the tradition of a long line of reclining Venuses, from those of Botticelli, Giorgione, Titian, and Velázquez, and on to the lesser divinities of Goya, Manet, and Gauguin. It is doubtful that Darger had any of these illustrious ladies in mind, but a pale reflection of one of them obviously troubled his imagination.

Chapter 8

¹ *King Lear*, 3.2.45–9.

² *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8–184 [366].

³ John C. Soley, *Sources of Volcanic Energy*, New York, 1924.

⁴ Robert and Hanson are identified as rulers of different states from time to time. For example, Robert appears as Governor of Angelinia. At some point in the story Robert Vivian becomes an emperor. He is also occasionally called King Robert.

⁵ Robert Vivian's account of the typhoon of 1841 occurs in volume one, chapter 1, pp. 14–16. All further quotations are taken from this account.

⁶ The complete title on the painting reads: *Robert Vivian, his brother going near the seashore notices ink dark and other colored clouds of threatening character, and of fantastic shape spreading over the south-western horizon*. The small size (22 7/8 inches x 16 5/8 inches), the use of six individual sheets to construct a single piece of paper, the addition of a typed label, and the fact that the picture is varnished, all imply an early date for the first illustration of *The Realms*.

⁷ This early Darger landscape calls to mind the creations of another Outsider, the psychotic master Guillaume Pujolle (b. 1893, one year after Darger). Pujolle also began with a traced picture, which grew increasingly subjective, visionary, and remote from the original as he worked on it. See Jean Dequeker, "Guillaume" (1948), in *Fascicule de l'Art Brut*, Paris, 1965, vol. 4, pp. 56–81.

⁸ Hanson's account of the typhoon is found in *The Realms*, vol. one, ch. 2, pp. 19–21. All further references are to these pages.

⁹ The shift from the city of Pandora to that of Calman-rinia is not explained.

¹⁰ Titled *Emperor Hanson Vivian finds his wife and daughter among the ruins*.

¹¹ We would do well to make use of a technical hint provided by psychoanalysis, treating this opening prologue as a first dream, or first communication, in analysis.

¹² Lawrence B. Stringer, *History of Logan County, Illinois*, Chicago, 1911, vol. 1, p. 40. "The storm could be seen forming, from the city of Lincoln, where it resembled a funnel, the lower portion resembling an elephant's trunk, twisting about in all sorts of contortions, bouncing in the air and then striking earth again."

¹³ I say this, despite the fact that the final 5,000 pages of *The History of My Life* is devoted to an endlessly detailed account of such a storm and its effects. That storm, the Chesterbrown Tornado (also called Sweetie Pie), is said to occur on August 15, 1913, and destroys several orphanages.

¹⁴ See Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London, 1962, vol. 3, pp. 303–22.

¹⁵ One additional date in this emotionally charged month may possess more than accidental significance. It was on April 8, 1911, that Elsie Paroubek was murdered, though her body was not found until May 9.

¹⁶ It is possible that Henry depicted himself in the person of Robert Vivian, future father of the Vivian girls, who according to this account were to be born only twenty-seven years after the events described in the prologue. This would place their collective birth in 1868, with the result that at the outbreak of the war in 1912, they would have been forty-four years old! Hanson Vivian appears to have remarried, and his wife occasionally appears in the story as the Vivian girls' aunt. They had no children. His only child, the daughter who died in the storm, was also called Violet Vivian.

¹⁷ For at least a part of the time during which the Dargers lived on Marble Place, the property opposite was unoccupied, thus providing Henry with a more expansive view of the northern sky than would otherwise have been the case.

¹⁸ This is even more true of the violent natural events described in *The History of My Life*, which is almost exclusively an account of natural disasters and their effect on mankind in Illinois.

¹⁹ From 1958 until 1967, Darger kept a daily record of the weather in Chicago, entitled "Weather Report of Cold and Warm, Also Summer Heats and Cool Spells, Storms and Fair or Cloudy Days Contrary to What the Weatherman Says, and Also True Too." At present there are six books preserved, with a gap of two years after book one, which probably implies the existence of a missing volume. These books are now preserved in the Darger Study Center of the American Folk Art Museum, New York.

²⁰ I associate this inability to feel or to be aware of emotion with the massive act of repression associated with his mother's death, but possibly, as well, with a pre-existing neurological condition. See Appendix A.

²¹ Over the course of the many years on which I worked on Darger, I was also becoming acquainted in detail with the life and work of the English poet and print-maker William Blake (1757–1827). I now see Darger as providing a striking parallel to Blake, a parallel in no way disturbed by the fact that Blake, as artist, had extensive professional training. Given the strange nature of Blake's mental state, and the bizarre nature of his visionary artistic production, he could easily be incorporated within the context of Outsider Art.

²² I use this word with extreme care and after much consideration. In all of my studies of the art of Outsiders, I have encountered only two whose creative functioning, however distorted as a result of a life of deprivation, nevertheless seemed to reflect an uninhibited

intellectual function truly deserving of the name genius. One was the Swiss psychotic master, Adolf Wolfli (1864–1930), the other, Henry Darger.

²³ These include a *National Geographic* map of the North-Central United States, dated June 1948, and full-page map from the *Chicago Tribune*, dating to May 19, 1969, and illustrating the areas affected by the Berlin Crisis. He also owned many more or less random copies of *National Geographic* magazine.

²⁴ See volume thirteen, p. 3236, for a reference to "geography maps." Darger owned a geography textbook, which was still to be seen in his room. Published by the American Book Company, it now lacks a title page.

²⁵ There were seven maps drawn by Darger preserved in his room.

²⁶ The study of "psychotic maps" is still somewhat rarefied territory for academic geographers. For this reason, the contribution of Deborah Carter Park and Paul Simpson Housley, of the Department of Geography of York University, "To the 'Infinite Space of Creation': The Interior Landscape of a Schizophrenic Artist," is of particular importance. Published in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 84: 2 (1994), pp. 192–209. It is my hope that they will eventually bring their expertise to bear on the Darger maps, as well as the task of evaluating *The Realms* as geography.

²⁷ I believe that the battles depicted are to be identified with events occurring toward the end of volume A. The names Parobeck, Parobech, and Purabech, which occur on the map, are references to Paroubek, the name of the child murdered in Chicago in April/May of 1911. See chapter 9.

²⁸ Darger's largest map, that of Angelinia Agathia, consists of two sheets of brown wrapping paper stitched together, and measuring 24 inches x 69 1/2 inches. It is apparent that Darger too had difficulty obtaining a sheet of paper large enough for his map. On the reverse is a shipping label which mentions St. Joseph's Hospital. Darger continued to work at St. Joseph's until 1947, and so it is probable that the map was completed at some time prior to that date.

²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), on unnumbered pages following p. 2271. The making of the map forms part of a separate story called "The Face at the Window" which is a later insert in the volume.

³⁰ This reference to the art activities of "child simpletons" may indicate a link between Darger's image-making and art activities at the Lincoln Asylum. If he associated his work with activities indulged in by the mentally handicapped, it might explain his extreme reluctance to let others know about them.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. three, unnumbered pages preceding p. 68. This quotation is based on a taped transcription, and may therefore differ somewhat from the original.

Who this general actually is, is not revealed, in that the incomplete text is only a fragment, inserted into volume three, but it is clearly someone disguised as Federal. Could it be Darger himself?

³² *The Tempest*, 5.1.41–4.

³³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2816.

³⁴ Darger collected references to major storms of all kinds, and was obviously interested in the study of weather. He was well aware of the different types of clouds. His library includes a curious, and not very informative, book by Alexander McAdie, one-time professor of meteorology at Harvard University, entitled *Making the Weather*, New York, 1923.

³⁵ *The History of My Life*, p. 3125.

³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2817.

³⁷ This opening incident, in which the children are carried off and disappear for a time, may be a conscious tribute to the opening events in *The Wizard of Oz*.

³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2818.

³⁹ Darger places this storm on January 24, 1906. A check of the *Lincoln Daily Courier* for that date yielded no such storm. The closest such events were extreme cold waves which occurred on January 27, 1904 and 1905.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. three, pp. 167–168.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Darger appears to have added a second sheet of paper at some time, and to have enlarged the composition, maintaining the same horizon line, but failing to match the color of the sky and to continue the forms of trees across the divide. His sensitivity to composition, however, allowed the two parts of the picture to function perfectly as one.

⁴³ This is one of a small group of monumental figural compositions in which the children's genitals are omitted. It should not be assumed on the basis of this drawing that the Vivian girls do not possess male genitals, since they definitely do! The drawing is unusual, on the other hand, in its unusual emphasis on clearly drawn nipples and navel.

⁴⁴ At some point in *The Realms*, Angelinia Aronburg is adopted as the eighth member of the group of seven, and Darger begins to refer to the eight Vivian girls.

⁴⁵ *The History of My Life* is now known to consist of a handwritten manuscript in eight volumes, 5,084 pages, dating to the years 1967–70. The strictly autobiographical account of Darger's life occupies only 206 pages, with the remaining 4,878 pages largely devoted to the description of a tornado.

⁴⁶ *History*, p. 3587.

⁴⁷ In Darger's daily diary, which dates from Sunday, March 24, 1968, he refers to his involvement with the writing of his autobiography. The first reference to the project occurs on Wednesday, April 3, 1968. "Still write my life history." On Friday, April 19, 1968, he comments, "continuing Life History Tornado description and what it ... I'm writing that's all." Despite this change in subject matter, he continues every day to mention that he is still writing his life history. It is only in January of 1971, after a long gap with no entries in the diary, he comments "From Friday, 1970 till Monday 1971 Everything I did was the same including writing a fictional story of a huge huge twister called 'Sweetie Pie' and the unbelievable horror it did." It is therefore apparent that as he wrote the story of the tornado, Darger considered it to be an aspect of the history of his life. Only after it was complete did he realize he had moved into fictional realms once again.

⁴⁸ *The History of My Life* stops on p. 5084, after which there are a number of blank pages. There is a weak ending to the work, as though the storm had "petered out," but one also feels it might well continue on the next page.

⁴⁹ The allusion is to a poem by Yeats.

⁵⁰ Central Illinois, in the area around Lincoln where Darger was still resident in 1906, is quite regularly visited by powerful storms, cyclones, and tornadoes.

⁵¹ Major cities affected by the tornado include Chester-brown, Gleason, Chestershire, Bunnybury, Johnston Town, Zaneville, and Lasalle.

⁵² *History*, p. 4783.

⁵³ Inserted between the pages of *The History of My Life* is a pamphlet printed on February 14, 1963, on "St. Dymphna patroness of the mentally afflicted," which Henry decided to retain.

⁵⁴ For example, the Sacred Heart Convent in Lasalle, another in Gleason, etc.

⁵⁵ L. Frank Baum, *The Lost Princess of Oz* [1917].

⁵⁶ *History*, pp. 4289, 4256, and 4958.

⁵⁷ *History*, pp. 4960-4962. In this case Darger is describing the destruction of a building to which he was paying numerous visits each day.

⁵⁸ *History*, p. 4313. We will return to consideration of moral and religious implications of this storm and other natural events in chapter 12.

⁵⁹ One of the essential characteristics of Darger's tornado, which he emphasizes again and again, is its tendency to follow railroad tracks, thus bringing it directly into major centers of population. Surprisingly this was an aspect of the Great Tri-State Tornado of 1925, "the greatest physical force of a tornadic nature ever to develop within the United States ... The heavy toll in deaths and injuries resulted from the tornado's path paralleling a network of railroads in southern

Illinois and southwestern Indiana, where it smashed through a series of commercial towns and small industrial cities with population concentrations ... The death-dealing funnel was imbedded in a dark, amorphous mass of whirling clouds and assorted debris that prevented a sighting of the approaching calamity." David M. Ludlam, *The American Weather Book*, Boston, 1982, pp. 112-14. While it is unlikely Henry was a witness to the destructive power of this tornado event, given his obsessional interest in storms, he undoubtedly read every account of it he could lay his hands on. That it was at least one of the models for "Sweetie Pie" is certain.

⁶⁰ *History*, p. 4157.

⁶¹ This change in name begins to be particularly apparent in the *History*, toward the end of volume four; see p. 4219 or 4430.

⁶² *History*, p. 3160.

⁶³ Although I have done considerable research on the name "Sweetie Pie," a common term of endearment, I have not as yet been able to link any specific image or object with this name to Darger's life experience or to his work.

⁶⁴ *History*, p. 3256.

⁶⁵ *History*, vol. four, around p. 3332.

⁶⁶ *History*, pp. 3347 and 3349. This is the second occasion I know of where Darger refers to himself as an artist, though in this case the context is rather more fictional.

⁶⁷ *History*, p. 4945.

⁶⁸ *History*, p. 3720.

⁶⁹ An unexpected confirmation of this interpretation is to be found tucked into volume five of *The History of My Life*. Between pp. 4716 and 4717, Darger has inserted a photocopied anatomical diagram of the male sexual organs as seen from the side. At the top of this school handout sheet he has written, "Not to be covered."

⁷⁰ *History*, p. 4748.

⁷¹ *History*, p. 4738. The significance of this strange symbolism will be explored in chapter 9 below.

⁷² Diary entry for April 16, 1968.

⁷³ *History*, p. 4760. Significantly, Darger introduced parallels derived from the experience of abused children at this point in his description of the storm's attack on children. "Did you ever read of children being battered and otherwise cruelly treated by too severe parents or cruel guardians. Cases of abuse and assaults of awful meanness on children? And what is known as battered child syndrome." *History*, p. 4760. Is it possible that these curiously modern references are to be understood autobiographically, as indirect allusions to Darger's own early experience?

⁷⁴ *History*, p. 4863.

⁷⁵ *History*, p. 4157.

⁷⁶ *History*, p. 4721.

⁷⁷ Revelation 16: 18 and 20. Given Darger's obsession with natural catastrophe and the end of the world, it would seem that he would be particularly drawn to the book of The Revelation, but to my knowledge he never refers to it.

⁷⁸ William Blake, taken from his description of his own depictions of the Last Judgement. See also his illustrations for The Revelation.

⁷⁹ Although Darger initially locates the Realms on another planet, he had little real interest in this fictional location, and for the most part, the nations he describes seem to be found somewhere on earth, separated from the better-known continents, North America and Europe, by vast and stormy seas.

⁸⁰ Immanuel Velikovsky [1895-1979] discusses the unusual hold of these ideas on the human mind in his book *Mankind in Amnesia* [1982].

⁸¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3371-3372. Coming from the final volume of *The Realms*, this is one of the last visions of Annie Aronburg, whose ghostly materializations to various people are described in chapter 9 below.

⁸² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3320.

⁸³ *The Realms*, vol. ten (part one), p. 10-187 [1931].

⁸⁴ John C. Soley, *Sources of Volcanic Energy*, New York, 1924. None of Darger's descriptions of impressive volcanic events is derived from this book, which he acquired only sometime after 1924. However, in that he cut eighteen plates of volcanoes from the book, it is probable that he used pictures from this book in his collage-drawings.

⁸⁵ *National Geographic*, 13: 7 [July 1902].

⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-272.

⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 253.

⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 580.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1234.

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 55.

⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 99.

⁹² I believe he adopted this imagery from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which he owned and was reading during the writing of the later volumes of *The Realms*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1216. The tendency to list buildings of all kinds, and to indulge in the accumulation of inappropriately abundant detail, is also found in the writings of the psychotic writer Adolf Wolfli. In Darger, one senses a greater awareness of the comical implications of this practice.

⁹⁵ As we have seen him refer to William James.

⁹⁶ This name may be a disguised tribute to Dr. C. B. Caldwell of the Lincoln Asylum, Physician Assistant during Darger's stay there. He also refers to Dr. Kerney Caldwell's *Our Earth and Its History of Violent Storms*.

⁹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 211. Darger's credentials vary with the nature of the disaster he is confronting. Since he is also head of the Gemini, it is clear that Darger and Darger are one. He uses this name only when he is posing as an expert.

⁹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 253.

⁹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 208. While volcanology exists as an academic discipline, volcanography appears to be a field of specialization confined to *The Realms*. The greatest explosion and earthquake in *The Realms* was that which destroyed the city of Abbieann.

¹⁰⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-285b. Darger himself draws the obvious parallels with Pompeii, the Lisbon earthquake, and Galveston [1900].

¹⁰¹ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 8-337a and b.

¹⁰² The first volume of *The Realms* includes Darger's description of the eruption of Mount Calverine.

¹⁰³ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-268 [534].

¹⁰⁴ In his study "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" [1910] Freud elucidates possible connections between "infantile sexual research" and the later development, through its sublimation, of intense scientific curiosity.

¹⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-207.

¹⁰⁶ Starring's expedition isn't really private in that he occasionally includes other children as members of his research team. At times he is accompanied by Angelina Aronburg, and various girl scouts, the Vivian girls, and Radcliffe. For a time he even joins forces with Henry Darger's expedition which includes members of the Gemini.

¹⁰⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight.

¹⁰⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 8-327b/8-328b. It seems very likely that at least parts of this text are borrowed from a textbook on geology.

¹⁰⁹ Darger's most coherent contribution to the literature on cataclysm is found in his amazing "Essay on Natural Disasters" which forms a 22-page section in chapter ten of volume eight of *The Realms*, pp. 362-384. Included in the essay is a lecture given to the boy and girl scouts by "Professor MicMahon of St. Michael's Catholic Scientific School" which focuses primarily on forest fires.

¹¹⁰ Curiously, Darger's scientific playfulness never resembles true science fiction, and he displays no interest whatever in outer space. In some respects he reminds one of the pre-Socratic philosophers in his ability to speculate about ultimate causes.

- ¹¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1473.
- ¹¹² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1464.
- ¹¹³ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 57.
- ¹¹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 8-356a/8-356b. In chapter 7 above, we visited the underground realms where liquid lava flows.
- ¹¹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-338a.
- ¹¹⁶ Mushroom clouds do enter Darger's pictorial art at a later date, undoubted evidence of an awareness, at least on an emotional level, of the atomic bomb.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Elsewhere, we are told by Starring that there are 149 craters in the region surrounding Abbieann: vol. eight, p. 221.
- ¹¹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-356a.
- ¹¹⁹ As we saw in chapter 5, Walter Starring is sexually far more enterprising than his creator.
- ¹²⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 8-236 [470].
- ¹²¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 214.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- ¹²³ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 215-216.
- ¹²⁴ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 218.
- ¹²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 220.
- ¹²⁶ Genesis 7: 10, 18-22.
- ¹²⁷ Leonardo da Vinci, "Description of the Deluge," in Manuscript E (c. 1514), as translated in Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 354-5.
- ¹²⁸ At present, it isn't evident why Darger chose this Wednesday evening of November 13, but he gives two different dates for the event, which occurred either in 1912 or 1913. The city of Schloedertown is presumably named after his friend William Schloeder. It is not impossible that Darger had a specific model in mind as the basis for the flood that inundates Sperryville. Many details of the destruction of the city resemble the Johnstown Flood of Friday, May 31, 1889, when a dam burst, releasing a wall of water 20 to 30 feet high on the city of Johnstown below. Some 2,100 valley residents lost their lives in a few hours. Darger would have been seven years old and still living with his father. It is likely that they read about it in the newspapers together.
- ¹²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1.
- ¹³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 2.
- ¹³¹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 3.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*
- ¹³³ Strangely, while all of the account of the flood caused by the blowing up of the dams on Lake Selicia, the destruction of Schloedertown, and the obliteration of Sperryville is found in volume four, there is another earlier account of the destruction of Sperryville on the night of November 13, 1912, in volume two, chapter 31, an interesting example of Darger's circular mode of writing.
- ¹³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, pp. 9-10.
- ¹³⁵ Having had the privilege of studying the work and thought of Leonardo da Vinci over the course of a year, in the context of a psychoanalytic seminar on his life and art which I taught in 1983, I can, without the slightest exaggeration, say that only in Darger have I encountered a mind which, though raw and untutored, reveals a similar range, compulsiveness, and creative power.
- ¹³⁶ Leonardo da Vinci, "Of the Deluge and how to represent it in a picture," in Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, vol. 1, p. 352.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 355-6.
- ¹³⁹ Writing of the Deluge drawings, and of Leonardo's instructions concerning the depiction of the Deluge, the great Leonardo scholar Carlo Pedretti points out that "Leonardo's visions of cataclysms, at times stylized beyond any logic of scientific representation, are unlike anything ever produced in the whole period of the Renaissance." *Leonardo: A Study in Chronology and Style*, Berkeley, Cal., 1973, p. 21.
- ¹⁴⁰ As a strange parallel to Darger's traumatic experience of a tornado in childhood, Pedretti says, "I believe that the Windsor series of deluges was inspired by an actual happening which brought back to Leonardo's mind the recollection of a terrifying experience of his childhood, the hurricane of 1456 described by Machiavelli. Leonardo was four years old at the time." *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Leonardo too seems to have conceived of the possibility of combining fire and flood. "And when flames of fire are mingled with clouds of smoke and water very opaque and dark clouds will be formed." Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, vol. 1, p. 357. Darger compares events at Sperryville with the great floods that inundated Galveston as a result of the hurricane which hit the city on September 6, 1900. This event, which took by far the greatest number of lives of any storm in the United States, appears to have influenced his writings about storms and floods. He may have borrowed some of his descriptions from books about that storm. See Ludlum, *The American Weather Book*, for an account of this event.
- ¹⁴² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 16.
- ¹⁴³ Approximately at the time that Darger was writing about the great floods in *The Realms*, America was experiencing one of the worst floods in its history. In the spring of 1927, the Mississippi Valley was inundated with serious floods far in excess of anything previously known. The Chicago newspapers would have been full of reports concerning the damage, which ultimately reached \$284 million, and 313 deaths. It is not impossible that some of the newspaper reports were adapted for the flood descriptions in *The Realms*.
- ¹⁴⁴ Children too, in handling liquid paints, occasionally indulge in similar flooding activities, becoming sexually excited in the process.
- ¹⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1389. The final paragraph, which may well have been borrowed, nevertheless seems to carry a burden of personal meaning, reflecting a personal experience of death or loss.
- ¹⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 159.
- ¹⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 166.
- ¹⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 168.
- ¹⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1751.
- ¹⁵⁰ *The Realms*, vol. four, ch. 103.
- ¹⁵¹ Sir Kenneth Clark, writing of the Deluge drawings, describes a similar process irrationally prompting Leonardo's creative process. "These Deluge drawings are in many ways the strangest of all Leonardo's many strange legacies to posterity ... They are abstractions expressive of his feelings about the movement of water. These feelings or, to speak more accurately, this obsession, which had for long been satisfied by relatively naturalistic studies, gradually came to demand a symbolic form ... Whatever its original intention, it has become a symbol. This conclusion leads me to ask whether the drawings known as the Deluge Series were not connected in Leonardo's mind with some visions of the end of the world." Kenneth Clark, "Introduction" to the catalogue *Leonardo da Vinci: Nature Studies from the Royal Library at Windsor Castle*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1981, p. 11.
- ¹⁵² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1362.
- ¹⁵³ *The Realms*, vol. five, pp. 252-253.
- ¹⁵⁴ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 297.
- ¹⁵⁵ Leonardo solved this problem by postulating that the interior of the globe of the earth was hollow and filled with water. "The presence of a 'vast cavern full of water' at the Earth's core is fundamental to Leonardo's views on the historical formation of the World." Carlo Pedretti, "Introduction" to *Leonardo da Vinci: The Codex Hammer formerly the Codex Leicester*, London, 1981, p. 13.
- ¹⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 211.
- ¹⁵⁷ In several of the Deluge drawings, Leonardo depicts a mountain falling into a lake, and sending tidal waves racing across the land. In a drawing in the Royal Library at Windsor, RL 12387, he depicts a mountain blown to pieces by a violent explosion. A small doorway cut into the side of the mountain may indicate the entrance to a subterranean powder magazine, with the implication that the explosion is deliberately caused by enemy forces attempting to set a natural disaster in motion, an astonishing parallel with Darger's theories.
- ¹⁵⁸ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 57.
- ¹⁵⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen (the final volume of *The Realms*), p. 3223, from a section entitled "Cruel Freaks of the Flood."
- ¹⁶⁰ Leonardo da Vinci, quoted in Pedretti, "Introduction," p. 20.
- ¹⁶¹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1471.
- ¹⁶² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1420.
- ¹⁶³ The reference here is to Turner's great picture *Rain, Steam and Speed*, and to his extraordinary ability to merge manmade and natural forces in an unforgettable abstract image of pure physical force.
- ¹⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 12-285a/12-285b [2630-2631].
- ¹⁶⁵ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 384.
- ¹⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 5.
- ¹⁶⁷ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 843.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁹ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 60. It is not clear why Darger, writing in the mid-1920s, would have been concerned with huge mushroom clouds, which seem to have begun to trouble human consciousness only after the explosion of the first nuclear bomb in 1945.
- ¹⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. six, pp. 427 and 434.
- ¹⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 519.
- ¹⁷² *The Realms*, vol. six. Jack Saunders's soliloquy continues over many pages. I have abstracted parts of it from p. 519, where it begins, adding an additional longer section from pp. 540-541.
- ¹⁷³ Jack's soliloquy also contains possible references to an early relationship, possibly homosexual, characterized by a degree of intimacy surpassing anything we associate with Darger in later life. "But now it would be like gazing at a photograph of a dead and almost long forgotten comrade, those are now his features, it is his face, and the days they spent together take on a mournful life in the memory, but the boy himself it surely is not no more." Could that boy have been named Jack Saunders?
- ¹⁷⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3324.
- ¹⁷⁵ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 229.
- ¹⁷⁶ 2 Peter 3: 10.
- ¹⁷⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross, London, 1987, p. 13. Interestingly, Bachelard also published studies on earth, air, and water.
- ¹⁷⁸ *History*, vol. three, p. 2661.

¹⁷⁹ The reader is reminded of the scrapbook, "Pictures of fires big or small in which firemen or persons lose their lives," in which Darger assembled newspaper clippings regarding major fires.

¹⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1400.

¹⁸¹ Descriptions of forest fires are found throughout *The Realms*. Volume five is almost completely devoted to them, as is volume six.

¹⁸² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1403. The numerous strange spellings may result in part from Darger's excitement.

¹⁸³ Leonardo too depicted forest fires deliberately set by the retreating armies of the Swiss, after their unsuccessful attack on Milan. See the red chalk drawing of two fires, one dated 16 and the other 18 December, 1511, in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.

¹⁸⁴ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 929.

¹⁸⁵ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 801.

¹⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 570.

¹⁸⁷ A relatively recent Canadian saint, who would have been spoken of in Chicago churches.

¹⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 13-231/13-231b [3372-3373].

¹⁸⁹ See Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, for a brilliant survey of the subjective and irrational human responses to fire.

¹⁹⁰ "That fire should at times be a sign of sin and evil is easy to understand, if one will recall what we said about sexualized fire. Every struggle against the sexual impulses must then be symbolized by a struggle against fire. A great number of texts could easily be found in which the daemonic character of fire is either explicit or implicit." *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁹¹ We examined the text associated with this collage-drawing in chapter 6. In this discussion of the picture I am more concerned with its dreamlike and subjective implications for Darger.

¹⁹² The link between birds and fire symbolism is commonplace, as is the phallic nature of the wide range of bird imagery used in the language of sex. The fire which the red bird steals is specifically a sexual fire. See Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*.

¹⁹³ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 384.

¹⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1476.

¹⁹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, pp. 1477-1479.

¹⁹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 241.

¹⁹⁷ On a number of occasions Darger makes reference to Dante's *Inferno*. He also refers to Milton's descriptions of Hell. It is not clear whether he had ever read Dante, but he does state that he had read Milton. On some level, he is clearly competing with these poets in his epic descriptions of a burning world. "As you well know, gentlemen, many famous poets have set their imaginations to play in picturing the frights and horrors of hell. I read the one of Milton, which is the greatest of them. Reading that sent shivers up and down my back." *History*, vol. four, p. 3332.

¹⁹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 241.

¹⁹⁹ Gaston Bachelard indicates that this is a familiar question: "Is the fire of Hell, the same or not the same as terrestrial fire? Texts are equally numerous in support of both views, for it is not an article of faith that the fire of Hell should be of the same nature as our fire." *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, p. 102.

²⁰⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3216.

²⁰¹ At the end of his life, Darger returned to the theme of fire. In *The History of My Life*, he describes, not only the destructive violence of the tornado known as the "Twister," or "Sweetie Pie," but also the struggle waged against a vast fire known as the "Smoulder." This fire, set by arsonists, burns over much of Illinois in August 1913. "The portion of the countryside now overwhelmed by this ever increasing smoulder is estimated to be over the middle of the Northern part of the State of Illinois ... the heat is felt not only north and toward Joliet, but in Chicago and in Rockford."

The Smoulder erupts, spreads, and is extinguished, entirely in volume three of *The History*. In the absence of forests in Illinois, the fire is confined for the most part to the soil, burning as peat smouldering among the roots. While enormously destructive, both in terms of property and human life, it is far more natural in character than the fire storms which decimate *The Realms*. The Smoulder is finally extinguished, despite its vast extent, by a good rain.

Given its relatively early date, and the fact that several of Darger's boy friends from the Lincoln Asylum are involved in fighting it, the possibility exists that it may reflect an extensive grass fire with which Henry may have been involved as a boy. Inevitably, in the telling, it attains enormous proportions, becoming "one of the most impressive events of the age" (p. 2726). Darger refers to it as, "a spectacle of overwhelming horror never to be erased or obliterated from the memory" (p. 2566). He plays a far more active, indeed heroic, role in this book, as an expert firefighter, leading the struggle against this fire. "My name is Henry Joseph Darger, of German descent," I announced sadly, "and I believe I was leading the greatest fire fight in history, right here" (p. 2807). Perhaps it is consoling to know that at the end of Henry's life the fires had died down to a smoulder, and could be easily extinguished.

²⁰² *The Realms*, vol. six, pp. 393-394.

²⁰³ Volume six was bound in or around July 1932, when Darger was forty years old.

²⁰⁴ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 394.

²⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 914.

²⁰⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 13-230 [3370].

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 86.

Chapter 9

¹ This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Elsie Paroubek whose short life was snuffed out so suddenly, and whose existence, after a short period of notoriety, has been forgotten. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my friend Bill Schoen of Chicago, for his generous assistance in reconstructing the life and death of this little girl.

² *Chicago Daily News*, Wednesday, April 12, 1911, p. 4.

³ *Chicago Daily News*, Tuesday, May 9, 1911, p. 1. The fact that Elsie Paroubek was probably murdered on the day of her disappearance, April 8, 1911, would obviously be of significance if Henry had been involved, since his mother's death and his sister's disappearance are associated with the first days in April.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ In response to a freedom of information request to consult the files on this unsolved case, I received a letter from James G. Piper, Director of the Records Division of the Chicago Police Department, stating, "The Chicago Police Department has no records of this case."

⁶ This chapter is perhaps the most difficult for the reader to follow. While I have tried to write about this material with clarity, it has been impossible to fully resolve or sort out all the confusion, contradictions, and the various levels of unreality which are characteristic of it. The fact is that with the Aronburg mystery we begin to approach the heart of Darger's madness. There is a psychotic quality to his writing whenever he touches on the murder of Annie Aronburg or the loss of her photograph. To what extent this chaotic state of affairs may be linked to the unsolved murder of Elsie Paroubek remains unresolved, because of the complete lack of historical documents connected with the case. Certainly, there is no evidence, apart from the fictional material which follows, which connects Henry Darger in any way with that murder.

⁷ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," pp. 295-304.

⁸ The exact identity of the murderer of Annie Aronburg remains somewhat obscure, with different stories being told at various points in the narrative.

⁹ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 397. Annie's age changes constantly throughout *The Realms*.

¹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, the final volume, p. 27b.

¹¹ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," pp. 295-304.

¹² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2265.

¹³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2256.

¹⁴ Reference Ledger, p. 382.

¹⁵ The important document survives in a number of different places. In *The Realms*, it is found in volume one, on pages 295–304. It also appears in volume thirteen, the final volume of *The Realms*, on pp. 3487–3496.

¹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 295–304. All further references are to this version of the document.

¹⁷ The dating of the “Predictions and Threats” is not easy. The last of the thirty-four predictions it contains is dated November 1916. The entire series of Darger’s complaints, and the full scope of his threats against God, will be examined in chapter 12.

¹⁸ “Predictions and Threats.” This prediction is dated August 1912 and concerns events predicted to occur some three years later. The term “petition” is used in the Catholic church to refer to an official request for prayers to be said in response to a particular situation.

¹⁹ “Prediction and Threats,” item dated March 12, 1913.

²⁰ In a strange document, “Found on sidewalk,” written by Darger in 1930, he mentions that he “refused to go to Mass for nearly over four years, and also through the same cause did not receive the Sacraments.” Given the many references to events occurring at the same time, it is evident that the period referred to was around 1917 and after. This document is discussed in detail in chapter 12.

²¹ Reference Ledger, p. 392. Elsewhere in *The Realms*, Darger offers an alternative solution whereby the loss of the picture may be made up for “only [by] its return or the adoption of two little girls and one boy.” *The Realms*, vol. A, p. A-57b (pages unnumbered).

²² *The Realms*, vol. A, p. A-29.

²³ Michael Bonesteel, “Chicago Originals,” *Art in America*, February 1985, pp. 128–34. I would like to thank Michael Bonesteel, who still retains a serious interest in Darger’s life and work, for meeting with me and describing his search for the real “Annie Aronburg.”

²⁴ Bonesteel points out, “By removing the P, then substituting an n for the u in Paroubek, Darger could have come up with ‘aronbek’ and easily converted it to ‘Aronburg.’” Ibid. p. 133.

²⁵ In *The Realms* he refers to “the battle of Parobek Run.” The newspapers in 1911 also employed a variety of spellings of the family name, including “Parobek” and “Porobek.”

²⁶ In this connection, see Anna Freud, “About Loosing and Being Lost,” in *The Writings of Anna Freud*, New York, 1968, vol. 4, pp. 302–16.

²⁷ It is a curious fact that Henry never seems to have contemplated the possibility that his sister had found a home in another family. Given his obsession with orphanages, it seems that he believed she had been sent to an orphanage. In his imagination his sister never grew up, at least not beyond a certain point.

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2256.

²⁹ Naturally, numerous places and things are named after Annie Aronburg the child rebel leader: for example, the Annie Aronburg bridge, the longest and strongest structure in the world, or “the long line of fortifications called by the name of the murdered child.”

³⁰ “The elder child slaves lead by Jack Evans coming to their senses at last rose up in insurrection in the fall of 1911.” *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3076.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3064. It is of interest that Jack uses the name Anna, but is clearly referring to Annie. This could lead to confusion with her sister Anna, the Rattlesnake Boy.

³² Darger had great difficulty keeping track of relationships in the Aronburg family. In volume thirteen, the final volume of *The Realms*, he refers to “general Concenterian Aronburg father of the murdered Aronburg child,” whereas, on most other occasions, he is her uncle (p. 13-27b). It also is stated, on one occasion, that the Aronburgs are related to the Vivian family, in that General Concenterian Aronburg is said to be a cousin of General Hanson Vivian, the Vivian girls’ uncle. Most surprising is Darger’s announcement in volume twelve (unbound) that he is a brother-in-law of Concenterian Aronburg: p. 12-433.

³³ Concenterian Aronburg is killed at the Battle of Easter Starring, in the final volume of *The Realms*. “Concenterian Aronburg the terrible coming up with his forces of Abyssinkilians saw the disaster and threw his forces forward ... and as he almost succeeded in rallying them, and filled them with enthusiasm, he fell shot through the heart” [vol. thirteen, p. 3312]. His dramatic departure provides an admirable example of Darger’s less than firm belief in the reality of death, since on p. 3437, during the course of a totally different battle, we are told that “general Concenterian Aronburg fell mortally wounded,” a state of affairs which Darger does not necessarily associate with death. Finally, on p. 3512 he shows up alive and actively involved in events. At the same battle, Phelan is reported to have been killed.

³⁴ In adopting the nickname Gertrude Angeline, Angelina Aronburg was undoubtedly honoring a dead child heroine who fell in battle: “The original Gertrude Angeline was shot down in cold blood at the battle of Erminie Creek.” *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3062.

³⁵ Darger’s choice of a modified photograph as a depiction of Angelina Aronburg is of interest in that it invites comparison with the missing photograph of her sister the murdered Annie Aronburg. Angelina Aronburg seldom is depicted in the collage-drawings, but she appears in those which refer to the eight Vivian sisters.

³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 556 and 687. Angelina Aronburg is most commonly paired in her adventures with two other girl scout leaders, Angeline Richee and Jennie Turner.

³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3382.

³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3386.

³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3387.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3507.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3325. This is the only time that Darger uses this strange name, Aronburg Raymond Federal. It is perhaps caused by the fact that Raymond Richardson Federal had already been killed by the Vivian girls earlier in the volume.

⁴² In fact, there are four Aronburg sisters. Angelina Aronburg tells us at one point that she “had two sisters elder than her, and one younger, one of which was claimed to have been murdered by the enemy, and two secretly serving in the army.” We will return to the question of gender changes, and the “boy” Radcliffe in chapter 10.

⁴³ Apart from the pictures of children which adorn this room in a barn, the reference to the phonograph provides yet another clue connecting the room in Snider’s Barn to Darger’s room in Chicago.

⁴⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 2160 (114). The reference to the spirit of Annie Aronburg will be explained shortly.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 2160–2161. The safe also contains a letter signed Fred J. P. Merry, which we will examine shortly.

⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2256–2257.

⁴⁷ Ibid. General Phelan is killed during the Battle of Easter Starring, in the final volume of *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3312.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), pp. 2256–2257. Darger changes his mind constantly about who committed the actual murder, and who was behind the deed. In the final volume of *The Realms*, Jack Evans tells us his story of the event: “it is a wicked lie for Glandelinia to say that Manley or many of the other Glandelinian generals who were accused had anything to do with it. It was that fierce and dreaded Phellinia Tamerline who planned and had it done” [vol. thirteen, p. 3382].

⁴⁹ Ibid. In the “Predictions and Threats” Darger claims to have instituted a petition in March 1913, thus providing us with a relative date for this conversation. Walter Starring’s account of the murder, in volume A of *The Realms*, differs considerably: “he gasped her open but did not tear nothing out as he didn’t have the time. Somebody fired upon him and he was compelled to flee or get killed himself by the rebels who seeing his act tried to shoot him from a high cliff. The murder itself had been committed somewhere in this very ravine and I can tell from that high cliff over yonder.” *The Realms*, vol. A, p. 4067 and following.

⁵⁰ *The Realms*, vol. A, p. 4069.

⁵¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3458–3460. All further references are to these pages.

⁵² *The Realms*, vol. A, pp. A-29.

⁵³ This catechism is found at the beginning of the Reference Ledger, p. 272. “Copied Catechism of Christian Doctrine ... Baltimore, Angelina, 1909.” His study of Christian doctrine was probably connected with his return to the Catholic faith in December 1909.

⁵⁴ Reference Ledger, p. 274.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Our confusion is intensified when we discover that this introduction to the copied catechism is signed at the end, Gertrude Angeline.

⁵⁷ The original letter and envelope were still in Henry’s room. The date doesn’t appear to have been changed, and the letter would therefore have been sent to Henry at St. Joseph’s Hospital, a few months before he was drafted into the army. The more conventional parts of the letter imply that Sister Rose had worked with Henry at St. Joseph’s Hospital. She refers to a number of his co-workers there, particularly Sister Camilla who we know from Darger’s account of his life at St. Joseph’s, in *The History of My Life*.

⁵⁸ The letter and envelope from the War Department were still in Darger’s room.

⁵⁹ Anna Freud describes the danger inherent in the overuse of defense mechanisms such as the “escape into fantasy life.” “The common escape into fantasy, which is of the greatest help to every child, is used excessively under the pressure of neurotic conflicts, and can then become the basis for a complete withdrawal and estrangement from the real world and its demands.” “Indications for Child Analysis” (1945), in *The Writings of Anna Freud*, vol. IV, p. 35. Given the nature of Darger’s mental state, psychoanalytic studies of the psychology of the child often seem more relevant to the task of understanding him.

⁶⁰ An interesting parallel is provided by the astonishing moment when Erik Erikson, in *Gandhi's Truth* (New York, 1969), stepped outside of the stance of an objective psychobiographer, interrupting his book to write an actual letter to the long dead leader, confronting him with his troubling personal doubts, disappointments, anger, and confusion (pp. 229-54).

⁶¹ The process is similar to that involved in obtaining "spirit-writings" on sealed planchettes, and then employing these "discoveries" as "evidence" in books demonstrating the truth of spiritualism.

⁶² The existence of the letters was known about for many years before their use in *The Realms* was discovered.

⁶³ Only three of the letters are addressed to Annie, the fourth bears the name of Concenterian Aronburg. Two of the remaining letters are versions of letters we have already examined: that from Sister Rose, and the invented letter from F. J. P. Mery, or Merry as he appears here.

⁶⁴ The revised letters to Annie Aronburg appear in *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3052-3053.

⁶⁵ The letter from Sister Cammillia is an obvious rewriting of a letter sent by Sister Camilla, Darger's co-worker at St. Joseph's Hospital. The original of this letter has not been found, but was undoubtedly sent to Darger in 1917 while he was in the army.

⁶⁶ The female spy is attempting to muddy the waters here, by referring to the death of another little girl named Evangelina Aronburg. Jack Evans also refers to the death in battle of this child, but is aware that there is no connection between her, and the murdered sister of Angelina Aronburg. The Vivian girls ask him about this little girl, and he replies: "Ain't she the real and original Aronburg child who was murdered?" "No, my beautiful little saints, I should say not," answered Evans ... "She is no relation of the two children, your little adopted sister [Angelina Aronburg], and her beloved sister who had been so cruelly murdered ... There is no excuse for the Gandelinians for this deed or any other, but nevertheless, it has nothing to do with the situation of the great Aronburg Mystery, as she is no relation." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3329.

⁶⁷ *The Realms*, vol. A, p. 4067.

⁶⁸ When, in the final vol. of *The Realms*, Huebaum Manley meets his death, it is also in a ravine ("the Abbieannians shot him dead, and left him lying in the ravine to rot," vol. thirteen, p. 3402). His body, however, is later recovered and given to his grieving father.

⁶⁹ Given the number of Tamerlines in *The Realms*, the reader is to be forgiven for confusing this General Richardson Tamerline with Thomas Phellinia Tamerline who is occasionally said to have assisted in the murder of Annie Aronburg.

⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 126.

⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 126-127. Curiously, when the Vivian girls now go off to check on the dead body, which is supposed to be still lying in the ravine, it is not there. "To their surprise there was no body at all, and they all went back terribly disappointed."

⁷² Also known as the Chesterbrown Tornado, this is an imaginary event, set in Illinois and occurring on August 15, 1913. He also calls it "The Tongue," claiming that it had a tongue (the funnel) which sticks out like that of a strangled child.

⁷³ *History*, vol. three, p. 3110.

⁷⁴ *History*, vol. four, p. 3587.

⁷⁵ *History*, vol. four, p. 4753.

⁷⁶ *History*, vol. three, p. 3113.

⁷⁷ *History*, vol. four, p. 4945. Parallels with the process of giving birth, or infantile fantasies envisioning it, are discussed in chapter 10.

⁷⁸ Darger's claim to have been "great friends" with Annie prior to her death is simply stated on one occasion only and is unsupported by events in *The Realms*.

⁷⁹ Reference Ledger, entitled "Please Return this Book to Its Proper Place. This Means you Henry D," pp. 383-392. All further references to this text are from this source.

⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 410-412.

⁸¹ Darger's spelling of the word "shuck," which is repeated three times, is "shock." It is possible this slip of the pen is suggestive of the nature of his experience.

⁸² In the final volume of *The Realms*, Darger indicates the precise extent of the losses in this battle. "Total in dead and wounded of all the cities wrecked by the fearful battle of Aronburg's Run or Glorinia, 303,915,714. Total in property destruction, \$649,668,265. Total in all the homeless, 45,860,016." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3018.

⁸³ As it turns out, it is not Darger who revenges the murder of Annie Aronburg, but the Vivian girls. "We know that two of us did a deed that aroused the whole world as we saw it in the papers. We killed general Raymond Richardson Federal, and the doers got the names of themselves in the papers. We were then so flabbergasted that we felt like flying to pieces. But the tragedy to Federal ought to be a good lesson to all the rascals and make them leave us alone in future." This may explain the fact that the Vivian sisters survive the war intact. *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3046.

⁸⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 410-412. All subsequent references to her appearances to General Zimmermann are to these pages.

⁸⁵ In conformity with Annie's promises to the old general, he does, in fact, survive to the end of the war, and plays a very important part in the final capture of Gandelinia, along with the triumvirate of Hanson, Robert Vivian, and General Jack Evans. "If the war is won we will all point to Zimmermann and say to the face of the world, 'There is the man who made the enemy fall upon his knees and beg for mercy.'" *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3510.

⁸⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3351-3352.

⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 7.

⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3521.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3356. August Darger died on January 27, 1916, an interesting example of how Darger incorporated actual facts along with fantasy.

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3507.

⁹¹ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3508.

⁹² *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3507.

⁹³ In fact, Phelan is killed in battle, not by Darger, in the final volume, thirteen, p. 3312. Darger is responsible for the death of a number of his variant manifestations in *The Realms*. As an Abbieannian general he is responsible for "killing every one of the remaining Tamerlines, Tamerline, Phellin Tamerline, Phellinia Tamerline, Tamerlinae, and Phellinia Tamerline."

⁹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3508.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3522.

Chapter 10

¹ William Blake, from manuscript fragments of "The Four Zoas," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Berkeley, Cal., 1982, p. 845. Quoted in Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*, New York 1996, p. 199. Ackroyd comments, "An early fragment of the poem describes eternal creatures who are also hermaphrodites."

² As will later become apparent, it will be necessary to consider, even in the absence of concrete evidence, the probability of passive sexual experiences of overwhelmingly traumatic intensity in Darger's childhood.

³ This is an assumption that has not gone unexamined.

⁴ In chapter 1, I refer to an actual contact between Darger and Nathan Lerner's young daughter Amy. See p. 71.

⁵ It may be the passage of fifty years that makes such scenes seem less innocent to us today.

⁶ Vol. twelve (unbound), p. 589a.

⁷ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 688.

⁸ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, p. 689.

⁹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, part one, pp. 690-691.

¹⁰ Reference to the "supposed wound" may also be interpreted as a veiled allusion to the female genitals.

¹¹ The overt nature of this passage from the later work finds no parallel in *The Realms*, and may represent a hint of maturation, or a failure of repression, in the later Darger.

¹² *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, p. 833. Darger's familiarity with burlesque houses could also account for his use of the term "Sweetie-Pie," since this was the nickname of a Folies show girl, Gladileen "Sweetie-Pie" Kisse.

¹³ *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, p. 693. This scene may reflect adolescent fantasies overheard by Darger, but little understood.

¹⁴ See Karen Machover, *Personality Projection in the Drawing of the Human Figure*, Springfield, 1968, pp. 51-4. In the Draw-A-Person test protocol, intense and repeated shading of any body part is thought to reflect acute anxiety connected with that body part, or its symbolic implications. The amount of repeated shading and pressure is felt to reflect accurately the degree of anxiety.

¹⁵ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3094.

¹⁶ Report of the Special Investigating Committee. "Recently [1907] it was suggested that they would put them in girls clothes if they were bad. " In 1910 they were still doing this to boys.

¹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 507.

¹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 289–90.

¹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 275.

²⁰ The term is Darger's.

²¹ Historically, little boys were regularly dressed as girls until quite late in childhood, a puzzling fact, since the opposite is seldom customary in any society.

²² However, my lesbian friends assure me that a little girl with a penis is emphatically not a little girl.

²³ It is important to be clear on this point. Many drawings exist in which little girls with their legs together are provided with male genitals.

²⁴ See Machover, *Personality Projection in the Drawing of the Human Figure*, for a detailed discussion of transparency of clothing in human-figure drawings.

²⁵ Wives and mothers are encountered with somewhat greater frequency in Darger's account of the great storm which destroyed Illinois in *The History of My Life*.

²⁶ Prior to the onset of actual experience of a woman's anatomy, boys commonly possess strikingly inaccurate ideas about the nature and position of the female genitals. Never, in my experience are they so totally misinformed as to believe that girls possess genitals identical to their own.

²⁷ The fact that Darger worked in hospitals throughout his adult life is occasionally mentioned in this context. The nature of Darger's work would for the most part have precluded intimate contact with patients. It is also clear that, given his assumptions, he was not about to be distracted or redirected in his beliefs by mere reality.

²⁸ My use of the term, "knowing and not knowing," derives from its frequent use by the British analyst Donald Winnicott. See "Knowing and Not Knowing: A Clinical Example," undated paper, published in D. W. Winnicott, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, and Madeleine Davis, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, pp. 24–5. A case involving a young man with adolescent dreams and fantasies of young girls with penises is discussed at some length in Winnicott, *Holding and Interpretation: Fragment of an Analysis*, New York, 1986.

²⁹ Roger Cardinal's son, Felix, as a child of three, played all day on the beach with another little boy. Both children were naked, but the other little boy wore a pink hat. At the end of the day, Felix announced to his mother, "You see, there are also little girls who have penises." He had assumed from the pink hat that this was a little girl. I am grateful to Agnes Cardinal for this marvelous piece of early history.

³⁰ For a useful summary of psychoanalytic theory relating to the concept of the "phallic woman," see Nancy Mann Kulish, "Gender and Transference: The Screen of the Phallic Mother," *International Review of Psycho-analysis*, vol. 13 (1986), pp. 393–404. I would like to thank Daniel Benveniste for drawing my attention to this important article.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London, 1955, vol. 10, pp. 5–147.

³² While Freud emphasizes that the delusion of the phallic mother is encountered in both boys and girls, it is not necessary that we explore its ramifications in female development here, since our concern is with Henry, as boy and man.

³³ Anna Freud, "Indications for Child Analysis" (1945), in *The Writings of Anna Freud*, New York, 1968, vol. 4, pp. 31–2.

³⁴ The extent to which the ubiquitous fear of castration is the result of experience of the mother's body, or that of another female child, or alternatively is inborn, is unclear and still a matter of controversy. This problem is not dealt with here.

³⁵ Fantasies concerning the female phallus are also embodied in mythology and in works of art. For a discussion of this material, see Geza Roheim, "Aphrodite or the Woman with a Penis," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 14 (1945), pp. 350–90. Also L. Shengold, "Parent as Sphinx," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 2 (1963), pp. 725–51.

³⁶ Anna Freud, "Indications for Child Analysis," pp. 32 and 35.

³⁷ For a discussion of factors reinforcing or fixating belief in the female phallus, see P. Greenacre, "Perversions: General Consideration Regarding their Genetic and Dynamic Background," in *Emotional Growth*, vol. 2, New York, 1954, pp. 627–40.

³⁸ Lawrence S. Kubie, in exploring the nature of the delusion of the female phallus, has raised the issue of a primary drive in the unconscious belonging to both sexes. Such a drive is certainly present in *The Realms*, where gender is continually perceived as somewhat flexible, and where the Vivian girls in particular are permitted to behave with masculine force and abilities. See "The Drive to become Both Sexes," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 43 (1974), pp. 349–426. I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth S. Benau for his helpful observations concerning the implications of Darger's identification with his dead sister.

³⁹ The same can be said, of course, of a whole range of imaginary animals, particularly dragons. Other embodiments of the phallic mother are seen in the unicorn, the sphinx (more obviously female and dangerous), and the witch, with her range of phallic attributes, particularly her flying broom.

⁴⁰ The encounter with powerful images and desires once active in us, but long ago abandoned, is usually disturbing, even frightening. Not uncommonly response to such a situation involves casual disbelief and laughter, masking feelings of unease or anxiety. No studies have yet been done of the differing responses of men and women, or children, to Darger's art.

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia [Dementia Paranoides]" (1911), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, p. 61. It should not be assumed that this fantasy in any way accounts for the overall genesis of homosexuality, in Freud's thinking, or that it is necessarily encountered in all homosexuals.

⁴² This is admittedly, in part, the result of the fact that explanations involving the sexual or aggressive abuse of children are currently very much in fashion. Some less clinically oriented individuals have even postulated bizarre assaults on Darger by organized satanic cults operative in Lincoln. For a suitable response to such suggestions, see Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend*, Chicago, 1993.

⁴³ The Asylum Day Books contain regular reports on the patient's medical problems. Henry is rarely mentioned and it can therefore be assumed that he was on the whole in good physical health. Injuries to patients were a regular occurrence, some being quite serious. These physical injuries were caused either by other patients or by the guards. Occasionally a guard was fired for hitting a patient, but in most cases such assaults were ignored. Injuries caused by other patients, including hitting with all kinds of objects, were common. Some of the injuries reported in the Day Books involving the rectum and bleeding suggest anal rape. This topic was not, however, mentioned in written reports by the physicians.

⁴⁴ Report of the Special Investigating Committee.

⁴⁵ For a detailed description of homosexual activities in Chicago institutions for delinquent boys, see Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story* (1930), Chicago, 1966.

⁴⁶ Clear evidence of homosexual activity on the part of inmates in state institutions for retarded children is provided by the drawings of mentally handicapped artist Dwight Mackintosh. See my book, *Dwight Mackintosh: The Boy who Time forgot*, Oakland, Cal., 1992.

⁴⁷ Report of the Special Investigating Committee. "Now, how often does the attendant in charge pass through the ward in the night time where children are sleeping? I think about every hour ... How many attendants are there at night then, or watchmen in that building, for instance the boys' dormitory? The boys' dormitory, there are two. Two at night?"

⁴⁸ James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, Berkeley, Cal., 1994, p. 123.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–6.

⁵⁰ A detailed presentation of documents relating to the scandal which overwhelmed the Lincoln Asylum in 1908 is found in Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind*.

⁵¹ Castration was occasionally used in the 1890s to control older boys and men who masturbated. Sterilization was commonly being used to deal with institutional overpopulation and for "the removal of inordinate desires which [are] an offence to the community." Isaac N. Kerlin, "President's Annual Address," *Proceedings of the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-minded Persons* (1892). Quoted in Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind*, p. 193.

⁵² Illinois General Assembly, *Investigation of Illinois State Institutions: Testimony, Findings, and Debate*, Chicago, 1908, pp. 45–6. Quoted in Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind*, p. 121.

⁵³ Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind*, pp. 119–22. In the application for admission forms used by the asylum, there is in fact a question concerning autopsies. "If the child is admitted, and dies while an inmate of this institution, and it should be decreed advisable, do you agree to that a postmortem shall be held at the option of the superintendent?" Deaths among the children were a very regular occurrence.

Chapter 11

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book Four, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1974, p. 269.

² Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh, the Man suicided by Society" (1947), in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, New York, 1976.

³ Darger certainly knew something of Dante. In the final volume of *The Realms*, writing of battle, he says: "So terrific was the roar of cannon and musketry that it seemed as if the ridges were on a rampage, the scene reminding one too forcibly of Dante's Inferno, and the shrivling punishments which are said to await the wicked on the side or far side of the Styx." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3044.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire [1821–67], *L'Heautontimoroumenos*, quoted in Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Princeton, N.J., 1995, p. 153.

⁵ Freud points to the intimate connection between the retreat into fantasy, and the creative process in the artist. "An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis." *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Lecture 23, in *The Standard Edition of the Collected Works*, vol. 16, p. 376. See also "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," *ibid.*, vol. 9, pp. 143–53.

⁶ As Freud points out, "If phantasies become over-luxuriant and over-powerful, the conditions are laid for the onset of neurosis or psychosis ... Here a broad by-path branches off into pathology." "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," p. 148.

⁷ Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "Everyone has a public world, a private world, and a secret world." Quoted in John McEwen, *Paula Rego*, New York, 1992, p. 31. Paula Rego, an astonishingly fine British painter, has been deeply influenced by the work and life of Henry Darger, painting a series of Vivian girl pictures in tribute to the artist.

⁸ I have elaborated on the formation and development of "continuing fantasies," in my essay "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Princeton, N.J., 1992, pp. 246–79.

⁹ Darger's production of actual "modified letters" from his fantasy world is a superb example of this search for greater concreteness.

¹⁰ In September 1990, a Darger exhibition planned by the American Federation of Art and intended to tour nationally was suddenly canceled. This was, in part, a response to the publicity associated with the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. However, it was clearly the controversial nature of some of the Darger collage-drawings which had provoked a panic response and an obvious act of censorship. Later Darger exhibitions omitted the offensive works. This too constitutes censorship.

¹¹ The dangerous situation of ignorance of their own aggressive and destructive drives, in which humanity perpetually dwells, is forcefully described in C. G. Jung's essay "The Undiscovered Self," first published in 1957. See *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 10, Princeton, N.J., 1970, pp. 247–305.

¹² The reader easily disturbed by violent and sexually perverse material is urged to proceed to the next chapter which deals with the moral problem of evil, and with Darger's relationship with God.

¹³ The amount of daydream and explicitly sexual fantasy material embodied in *The Realms*, and in Darger's other writings, particularly *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, easily surpasses, in quantity and quality, the similar kinds of subjective material that would be presented in the course of a lengthy classical Freudian analytic treatment extending over years. In terms of its sheer length it may be unmatched by any other confessional literature in the world. For this reason it offers a rich source of material for the psychoanalytically oriented research student.

¹⁴ This is not to imply, paradoxically, that these same fantasies did not lead on occasion to sexual arousal and orgasm.

¹⁵ Darger could have had no awareness of ritualized master-slave relationships embodied in formal sado-masochistic fantasies and group practice.

¹⁶ Authorities involved in the study of serial killers are very much aware that in interviewing their subjects they are never likely to encounter the individual in the mental state in which he kills. There seems to be a sudden shift into a vastly more primitive mentality that is otherwise covered over and concealed. The true madness of the serial killer is glimpsed only by his victims. The question we might ask is to what extent we are allowed to see it in the Glandelinians in unadulterated form.

¹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. four, pp. 193–194.

¹⁸ *The Realms*, vol. nine (unbound), p. 1043.

¹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 194.

²⁰ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9–848b.

²¹ Although the term "concentration camp" was introduced during the South African War (1899–1902), it is probable that for Darger it is linked with the camps established by the Nazis after 1933.

²² "Nuded" and "denuded" appear to possess the same meaning – "stripped." This double-sided drawing is of interest in raising the possibility that Darger occasionally used the two sides of a drawing, not so much to suggest a sequence of events, but to portray the views in two directions – to the north and south of a single scene – so that the viewer would imagine himself standing in the middle with one view to each side. Since in part two of this drawing reference is made to "next day" both factors are involved, with the two sides used to depict both space and time.

²³ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 110.

²⁴ In the King James Version of the Bible, this passage is from The Gospel of St. Matthew 18: 5 and 6. Darger would undoubtedly have used one of his copies of the Vulgate.

²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1599.

²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 194.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 1043. This account was probably, as Darger hints, borrowed from an actual case reported in the newspapers.

²⁹ Darger owned many copies of the American version of this Angelinian magazine.

³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 51. As far as I know, Darger never depicted this scene, which is so suitable for pictorial representation. He concludes this account with references to "the New England stocks," and to "torture in Europe's Dark Ages." This particular torture may have been influenced by fictional accounts he owned of life on Devil's Island, for example, *Condemned to Devil's Island: The Biography of an Unknown Convict*, New York, 1928. This book is unusual in that it includes numerous references to homosexuality. Elsewhere he borrows from literature to describe in great detail the death of a group of children using the device described in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*. See *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 365. Obviously he sought accounts of torture and death in a variety of sources.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 519.

³² *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 521.

³³ It is probable, however, that if he had experienced such an attack in childhood, the traumatic effect would have brought about its repression, erupting only in the preoccupation with strangling children, in this way allowing him to experience actively what he had once endured as a passive victim.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 118.

³⁵ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 128.

³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 99.

³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 99.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven. The very frequent repetition of the words "fair" and "fairly" is probably meaningful, and may imply a sense of justification in connection with these assaults on children.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 572. A similar scene exists on a loose piece of paper in Darger's room. Hand-written, it is one of a small number of extant manuscript pages which were later typed, with occasional minor changes, directly into *The Realms*.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 118–120.

⁴² The drawing of the child's feet, as if broken off at the ankles, indicates that this is a study not for a real scene, but for a damaged statue of a Glandelinian strangling a child.

⁴³ Having arrived at this image, Darger used it in a number of collage-drawings, with the adult depicted in both clothed and unclothed versions. See illustrations 6.5 and 11.3.

⁴⁴ In Freud's early writings, this link between anxiety and the experience of suffocation is explored in terms of the initial human experience of birth. "The name 'Angst' – emphasizes the characteristic of restriction of breathing which was then present as a consequence of the real situation, and is now almost invariably reinstated in the affect." See *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, Lecture 25, "Anxiety", in *Collected Works*, vol. 16, pp. 396–7.

⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 103.

⁴⁶ This picture is reproduced in *Raw Vision*, 8 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 26–7.

⁴⁷ This loss of control is perhaps best seen in the collage-drawing *At Phelantonburg. What they saw* (see illustration 11.9), which includes a great deal of freehand drawing. The picture is one of the very few in which Glandelinian women are involved in strangling children.

⁴⁸ Penises are occasionally shown "flipped up" as a result of violent motion, but never enlarged. Darger was obviously familiar with the experience of sexual arousal and of erection but chose not to depict it.

⁴⁹ Considerably later, a completely unrelated but strikingly similar image of an open mouth and protruding tongue became the logo of the Rolling Stones. Introduced in 1969, and designed by Andy Warhol, it depicted the mouth and tongue of Mick Jagger. I would like to thank Stones fan Ralph Scott of Chicago, for this information.

⁵⁰ No evidence survives suggesting that Darger went to the movies, though he must on occasion have seen films. He seems to appreciate their ability to record certain kinds of events.

⁵¹ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 580. Volume three, which I have used extensively to illustrate this more extreme behavior, contains some of the longest, most varied, and extreme scenes of torture.

⁵² *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 582.

⁵³ My unpublished short study "Interior Voyages" [January 1963] examines the contribution of imaginary architecture, as developed in sexual fantasy, in the context of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and particularly in terms of the architecture and form of the Island of Laputa.

⁵⁴ Hanging as a mode of execution was more socially acceptable in Darger's lifetime, and depictions of death by hanging were not unusual. Darger owned a cut-out photograph of a lynching in which a black man is seen hanging from a tree.

⁵⁵ I know of no matching picture, though one must have existed. Darger's hanging scenes regularly come in pairs. Several two-painting sets depicting the execution of the Vivian girls exist. Set outdoors, the two pictures are used to represent the initial predicament and the subsequent miraculous escape.

⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. three, pp. 582-583.

⁵⁷ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 829. The religious character of this passage and evident links with the lives and deaths of the saints will be discussed in chapter 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 829.

⁵⁹ Classical images of wind gods, youthful faces puffing out their cheeks as the source of the wind, provide an interesting parallel to Darger's independent pictorial invention.

⁶⁰ Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice," in *The Poems of Robert Frost*, New York, 1946, p. 232.

⁶¹ Daniel 3.

⁶² Matthew 2: 16.

⁶³ Here it would appear that Darger has conflated two biblical stories, the account of Daniel's three companions being thrown into the fiery furnace, and that of Daniel cast into the den of lions.

⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 571.

⁶⁵ It is, however, not without significance that some of the "accidents" which led to the investigation of the Lincoln Asylum involved precisely such hideous burns and scalding.

⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 578.

⁶⁷ I have not yet found such a scene in any of his illustrations for *The Realms*. Darger's description of the furnace and the room it is in is so detailed that it is quite certain that his fantasy included a detailed visual depiction of the specific architectural space.

⁶⁸ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 579.

⁶⁹ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 52.

⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 115.

⁷¹ This observation leads deep into psychoanalytic theory concerning sado-masochism, and the primacy of masochism as the underlying drive motivating the sadist as well as the masochist. See Karl Menninger, *Man Against Himself*, New York, 1938, and Theodore Reik, *Masochism in Modern Man*, New York, 1941.

⁷² *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 572.

⁷³ A catamount is a wild animal of the cat family.

⁷⁴ *The Realms*, vol. three, ch. 42.

⁷⁵ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 591.

⁷⁶ Donatien Alphonse François, Comte de Sade. See in particular his incomplete book, *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* (1785). While de Sade's writings also reveal influences stemming from the fantasies of childhood and adolescence, in their final form they reflect a more adult version of sadism than that which we encounter in Darger, where adolescence still reigns.

⁷⁷ Darger's more violent writings are, as we shall see, of particular interest in making visible the psychological makeup of the serial killer, to a far greater degree than is possible through interviews with such rare individuals.

⁷⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, pp. 115-116.

⁷⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 104. Such confusion of pronouns indicative of gender is quite common in Darger's writings in those scenes where he becomes inordinately excited.

⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 103.

⁸¹ Darger is clear about the meaning of the term "siege," but in this context it would have been more appropriate to refer to the sack of Genitori. Is his use of the name Genitori [genitals], like "Glandelinian," intended to convey that he knows more than he lets on?

⁸² *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 318-325. All following references to the siege of Genitori are from these pages.

⁸³ References to "tumbrills" moving through the city may derive from Darger's reading in the history of the French Revolution. He owned a copy of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, though material tucked into its pages seems to imply a late date for his reading of it, at least his reading of this edition.

⁸⁴ In *The Realms*, the Vivian girls suddenly describe going through every one of the tortures endured by the child slaves in volume three [which we examined earlier], at which they were not present.

⁸⁵ So far, I have found no illustrations depicting the massacre at Genitori.

⁸⁶ An example is a scene described in *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, when they paint "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," a picture which survives exactly as described (illustration 6.11). We have also seen the Vivian girls at work on maps, similar to those that Darger actually executed himself. Did he imagine, at some level of unreality, that all of his later collage-drawings were the work of the Vivian girls, and not by him at all?

⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, pp. 3160-3161. This is a passage which may reflect the hospital gossip Darger undoubtedly heard occasionally about the condition of patients admitted to emergency. Although he worked for the most part in the kitchens of hospitals, he would have been exposed to discussions concerning unusual or particularly violent cases.

⁸⁸ This observation can be confirmed by a visit to the church, which still stands.

⁸⁹ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1563. Darger often referred back to this massacre in later volumes. It seems to have left a particularly strong impression in his mind.

⁹⁰ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1563. This is a slightly more complete version of the account of the massacre at Phelantonburg, published in my article "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Princeton, N.J., 1992, pp. 263-4.

⁹¹ I believe we are looking at material originating in the anal phase and earlier, though there are some indications that he may have regressed from a briefly attained phallic phase.

⁹² The spelling of the names of battles and cities, and of individuals, varies somewhat over the years. This city is probably named after Darger's roommate Thomas Phelan.

⁹³ Although it may have been abandoned in a partially unfinished state, it was included in one of the bound volumes of illustrations. Cut out later, its left edge was seriously damaged.

⁹⁴ The massacre at Calmanrinia [also Calmanrinia] occurs in volume nine, p. 904 and following. All quotes are to these pages unless otherwise noted.

⁹⁵ This is the first half of the massacre at Calmanrinia; the remainder will follow shortly.

⁹⁶ I am aware that I am assuming a connection between Darger's sadistic fantasies and masturbation in the absence of evidence. It is possible that it was, in part, an increase in unrelieved sexual tension that ultimately provoked these explosions of fantasy violence, but it seems unlikely that fantasy alone, no matter how extreme, could have relieved the situation.

⁹⁷ Imaginary machines designed for the impersonal torture of victims are a not unusual feature of sadistic fantasy. Darger speaks of whipping machines and "a machine of knives."

⁹⁸ One factor challenging this assumption is the fact that one of the pictures, *At Calmanrinia strangling and beating children to death*, bears a second inscription confusingly identifying it as *At Cedernine murdering naked little girls*, which raises the possibility that depictions of massacres were to some extent interchangeable.

⁹⁹ Robert Cullen, *The Killer Department*, New York, 1993, pp. 30-31. This is a description of the work of the Russian serial killer Andrei Chikatilo.

¹⁰⁰ As a sexual perversion necrophilia can involve specifically sexual activities (intercourse, masturbation, etc.) and orgasm, but it need not as long as the element of erotic attraction is present.

¹⁰¹ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 173.

¹⁰² *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1514.

¹⁰³ Dr. Morrison has interviewed a total of forty-two serial killers. "The common stereotype that the serial killer was an abused child is without foundation." Radio interview with Dr. Morrison.

¹⁰⁴ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 15b.

¹⁰⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1180. The fantasy of sadistic assault on the mouth and throat, with various instruments forced into this opening, may imply a passive and frightening experience of fellatio. Such experience would also account, in part, for his obsession with suffocation, and with sadistic and overwhelming attacks by adult males.

¹⁰⁶ The reader is reminded of the story of the mysterious floating knife, which now takes on deeper unconscious implications as a penis substitute, reflecting perfectly obviously on the no less mysterious phenomenon of erection.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Bonesteel, in *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000, mentions his discovery in Darger's *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, section 2, p. 66, of a definition by Darger of "rape." "What is rape?" asked Penrod. "According to the dictionary, it means to undress a girl and cut her open to see the insides," said Joice." Given this singular definition, it seems possible that Darger's knowledge of sexual activity may not have gone beyond the adolescent fantasies we have been exploring here.

¹⁰⁸ The picture is titled *At Jennie Richee. Breaking jail second time wounding and killing guards, freeing 68 child prisoners*. As yet, I have not located any account of such "sewing up" of children in the text.

¹⁰⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 102. Jennie's dream provides a marvelous example of "identification with the aggressor." See Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, revised edition, New York, 1966, ch. 9, "Identification with the Aggressor."

¹¹⁰ I would like to thank the members of the San Francisco Psycho-biography Seminar (1992), and the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, for their careful attention to the details of Darger's life history, and for their considered comments in response to this biographical material.

¹¹¹ In the case of more normal births there is another explanation utilized by children, the so-called cloacal birth theory, and more rarely the idea of birth via the mouth.

¹¹² At no time does Darger ever refer to the removal of the reproductive organs, most likely because he was unaware of their existence.

¹¹³ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 109.

¹¹⁴ Robert K. Ressler and Tom Shachtman, *Whoever fights Monsters*, New York, 1992, p. 2. Numerous serial killers have eaten, even cooked, parts of their victims' bodies.

¹¹⁵ Norman Mailer, *An American Dream*, New York, 1964, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ In her dazzlingly insightful study of twentieth-century depictions of sexual murder in art, Maria Tatar analyzes the tendency of critics to engage in denial when faced with images of sexual violence directed at women. "To argue that images of sexual and homicidal assault are culturally innocent is to take an almost willfully naive position about the role of ideology in artistic productions ... Yet even once we agree to problematize images of sexual violence, our interpretive habits can prevent us from facing the full implications of what is represented ... Focusing exclusively on formal features and insisting on disfigurement as a purely aesthetic principle can distract from facing the full consequences of what is at stake in pictures we see and in the words we read. It is endlessly reassuring to deny many of the unpleasant personal and cultural truths underlying the artistic construction of violent images." *Lustmord*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁷ Obtaining unrestricted access to such extreme fantasies in an individual who has not come into conflict with the law, or even in one who has, would be an extremely rare event. Only through the writings of Darger, which were never intended to be seen, is such access possible. A case of a serial killer, who in co-operating after the fact with efforts to understand provided extensive fantasy material as well as drawings, is to be found in Brian Masters, *Killing for Company: The Case of Dennis Nilsen*, London, 1985.

¹¹⁸ Ressler and Shachtman, *Whoever fights Monsters*, pp. 84-5. The phrases in quotation marks are the words of a serial killer. Ressler introduced the term "serial killer."

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

¹²¹ The main reason inclining me to take the stand that Darger probably did not become involved with the actual killing of children at any point in his life is that had he begun it would probably have been impossible for him to stop. Actual involvement with murder would also most likely have precluded his continuous involvement with creative activity. Nevertheless, throughout my research, most of which was conducted in his room, this possibility was never far from my mind.

¹²² The most famous serial killer is Jack the Ripper whose murders of five women in 1888, involving unimaginably violent attacks on the interior of the body in some of the cases, have preoccupied the Western imagination ever since. See *The Diary of Jack the Ripper*, narrative by Shirley Harrison, New York, 1993. Thus far I have found no reference to the anonymous "Jack" in any of Henry's writings.

¹²³ I was initially introduced to the Heirens case by various Chicagoans who I interviewed or encountered while investigating Darger's life. Parents used it as an example to warn their children against strangers. I realized its possible impact on Henry only when I was reading Robert Ressler's moving account of the case in *Whoever fights Monsters*, tracing the case as it unfolded in the Chicago papers in 1946 enabled me to see it as Darger would have seen it, at full intensity, day by day.

In recent years, serious questions have been raised concerning the possible innocence of William Heirens. See "Kill-Crazed Animal: Why is William Heirens still in prison? How did he get there to begin with?" *Chicago Reader*, 18: 48 (Friday, August 25, 1989), pp. 1, 18-35. While this would leave the murders unsolved, this does not, of course, affect the possible impact of the newspaper accounts of the case on Darger at the time.

¹²⁴ The use of "never" in the context of Darger's vast oeuvre, notebooks, and collections, must be tentative until such time as the vast accumulation of material has been fully studied.

¹²⁵ Ressler and Shachtman, *Whoever fights Monsters*, p. 21.

¹²⁶ Interview, April 9, 1997. "One had occurred in the last few years near his house. He had clippings about it on the walls. In the clippings they didn't know who did it. I found myself wondering if he did it. I was a woman, and all the little girls, the stuff was upsetting ... That wasn't the only one. He had five or six, maybe ten up on the walls. Out of all the things this obsessed me. I wondered about calling the police."

Significantly, no such clippings adorned the room years later when I came to know it. Nor did they turn up in Darger's clipping collections. One can only assume that they had been removed, most probably by Nathan Lerner, possibly because they were too upsetting to visitors to the Darger room.

¹²⁷ Inscription on the drawing. The idea of enclosing explosives in the abdominal cavity of a child also has a bearing on our observation that as a child Darger may have equated the deadly process of giving birth with a destructive explosion originating inside of the body.

¹²⁸ Antonin Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty" (First Manifesto), reproduced in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, p. 244. The title of this section, borrowed from Artaud, is intended to provide a context within which Darger's savage imagery, and radically new aesthetic, may find, if not acceptance, then tolerance.

¹²⁹ Francis Bacon interviewed by David Sylvester (October 1962), New York, 1975, p. 23.

¹³⁰ The question might lead us far afield into the aesthetics of film footage shot in Nazi death camps, or to an examination of the formal qualities of so called "snuff films." I intend to deal with the question here, only insofar as it has a bearing on Darger's oeuvre. For additional thoughts on this problem as it concerns Outsider Art, see my article "Marginal Outsiders: On the Edge of the Edge," in *Portraits from the Outside: Figurative Expression in Outsider Art*, New York, Parsons School of Design, 1990, pp. 11-18.

¹³¹ In her study of depictions of sexual murder in Weimar Germany, Maria Tatar seriously examines "whether the representation of violence can shade into real-life violence and whether the production of violent images is not in some ways predicated on the desire to violate real-life bodies. Does art, as Dix claimed it did, have a preventative function, foreclosing on the desire to commit murder in real life, or does it feed what criminologists call the twentieth century epidemic of violence?" *Lustmord*, p. 19.

¹³² The picture was included in the Outsiders exhibition mounted by the Arts Council of Great Britain at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1979, where it excited much controversy. It is listed as number 51 in the catalogue. It has never been exhibited or reproduced since, with the exception of a detail reproduced in my article, "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," *Raw Vision*, 13 (Winter 1995/96), p. 31. In February 2001, it was exhibited along with many other violent Dargers in an exhibition at PS 1, in New York.

¹³³ In Darger's room, a number of reproductions in magazines and calendars present Christian works of art, altarpieces in triptych form. These include Hans Baldung's *Adoration of the Magi*, reproduced in "Masterpieces on Tour" in *National Geographic*, December 1948, p. 725, and Albrecht Altdorfer's *The Fall of Man* in the same magazine, November 1956, p. 626. It is, therefore, likely that he understood the concept of the triptych, as well as its use in Christian art. It is rare, however, for Darger's three-panel compositions to conform so clearly to the format and function of a true triptych. In many of his three-panel compositions, the numbering begins at the center with panel one, two is on the left, and three is at right.

¹³⁴ Freud's work does involve in many ways an aesthetic and critical examination of the principles of dream-formation, a detailed elucidation of both the structure and construction of the dream as a whole, and its individual images.

¹³⁵ These images can only be compared in violence and in the extent of the mutilation involved to photographs of corpses made at the scene of crimes perpetrated by serial killers. Such photographs are seldom released to the public. An exception is the book by Erich Wulffen, *Der Sexualverbrecher: Ein Handbuch für Juristen, Verwaltungsbeamte, und Ärzte*, fourth edition, Berlin, 1910.

¹³⁶ Darger's collection of magazines and calendars included numerous reproductions of paintings of the crucifixion in which the cross appears silhouetted against the sky.

¹³⁷ A study has yet to be done of "Glandelinian art," that is, monumental works of art (paintings, murals, monumental sculpture and architecture) seen in Glandelinian interiors, or more frequently in outdoor settings, and usually depicting the murder of little girls by large and heroic Glandelinian officers. The central panel of this work is a unique example of Glandelinian design using as medium the bodies and body parts of dead children.

¹³⁸ It is likely that the sculptural assemblages of severed body parts which Dahmer created and photographed bear a certain similarity to the Glandelinian "reliefs" shown here. The "aesthetic" impulse is certainly similar. See Brian Masters, *The Shrine of Jeffrey Dahmer*, London, 1993, for a detailed discussion of the design and function of this altar and Dahmer's photographs.

¹³⁹ Darger depicts the small intestine as though it is attached to the bladder. This strange revision of anatomy allows it to function as a substitute penis, hanging down between the legs of the little girl. Frequently, his emphasis on the fate of the intestines, cut off or dangling free, seems to represent a symbolic substitute for the penis and a preoccupation with castration.

¹⁴⁰ My unpublished discussion of Théodore Géricault's preparation for the painting of *The Raft of the Medusa* examines a curiously similar involvement with the macabre, and with severed heads and body parts, putting forward a possible psychological explanation for this unusual manifestation of the creative process. For a brief discussion of this material, see *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, Princeton, N.J., 1989, pp. 41-2. Géricault also did a number of still-life paintings using severed and rearranged body parts. Obviously, in such a context, the words "still-life" or "nature morte" take on a strange significance.

¹⁴¹ An unconventional crucifixion triptych by Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, provides a striking parallel to Darger's heretical triptych. In an interview with David Sylvester, Bacon described his mental image

of the Cimabue crucifixion: "You know the great Cimabue Crucifixion? I always think of that as an image – as a worm crawling down the cross. I did try to make something of this image just moving, undulating down the cross." To clarify Bacon's meaning, the Cimabue is reproduced upside down on the page. Also significant in the context of contemporary use of the triptych format is Bacon's early masterpiece *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, executed at approximately the same time as the Darger triptych, in 1944.

¹⁴² An artist whose taste for extremes of sadistic violence and anatomical mutilation closely approaches Darger's is the Japanese printmaker Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861).

¹⁴³ To my knowledge, Nathan Lerner never allowed this picture to be exhibited in America, out of concern, I believe, for Darger's reputation. It was first exhibited, after Lerner's death, in 2001, at PS 1, in New York.

Chapter 12

¹ This chapter, which explores Darger's passionate but ambivalent relations with God, is in the best sense a collaborative effort. I owe much of my understanding of Darger as a Christian mystic of originality and power to long conversations with Nathan Lerner. Nathan's background, rooted in Russian Jewish thought and tradition, gave rise in him to a deeply personal mysticism which made him uniquely sensitive to Darger's lifelong struggle to understand both God's role in the world, and His agonizing silence.

² The First Book of Moses called Genesis 32: 24–30. I have chosen this quotation since it appears that the angel with whom Jacob wrestled that night was God.

³ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," p. 295, Prediction dated August 1913. Connected with the fall of Graham's Bank, this threat contains a reference to the date January 1, 1919 and may belong to this period in the writing of *The Realms*.

⁴ Darger's fantasy of a Catholic utopia is fully embodied in a detailed passage where he describes a "Gölden Age," when "Abbieann city reached the summit of its glorious power, and the pinnacle of its unusual righteousness." Vol. ten, part one, pp. 194–207.

⁵ Alternatively, it may reflect the decor of chapels in the Catholic hospitals in which he worked.

⁶ This painting, the right panel of a three-panel composition, is owned by the Chicago Art Institute, a gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner.

⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 2257. In later years Darger attended the Church of St. Vincent de Paul. Earlier he attended services at St. Anthony's parish, Chicago.

⁸ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 114.

⁹ In his library we find books such as Cecilia M. Caddell's *Blind Agnese or the Little Spouse of the Blessed Sacrament* (P. J. Kennedy and Sons, New York, n. d., but with an inscription dated 1922), or Rev. F. J. Remler's *Supernatural Merit: Your Treasure in Heaven*. Far more influential, and of better quality as literature, is John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹⁰ In a letter dated June 19, 1917, Sister Rose expressed an interest in Darger's early efforts at writing about a Catholic Lodge. "... if your writing about it pleases you, be sure that Sr. Rose will also be interested."

¹¹ See my *Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, for a detailed presentation of historical influences evident even in psychotic art produced in the asylum.

¹² A collection of such commercial images, with a few interspersed masterpieces, was assembled by Darger in book form. This homemade collection of religious art was found in his room after his death.

¹³ The first significant reference to the Pope in *The Realms* occurs in volume one where, in a delightful vignette, we hear of the generosity of Catherine Vivian who, despite her poverty, gives her only diamond to a priest as a gift for the Holy Father, on this occasion resident in Abbieannia. "This evening I leave for Abbieannia to visit the Holy Father there. I shall tell him of all your good wishes, and of your kind greetings, and I will hand him your gifts gladly, and in return I will ask him to bless you and all your friends" (p. 113).

¹⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, pp. 214–215.

¹⁵ It is naturally a matter of some interest to know which Pope Henry might have had in mind. In volume ten of *The Realms* two letters are sent to Pope Leo XII of Angelinia. While the contents are of no interest, it is a matter of some curiosity that Darger chose this pontiff, who was head of the church only from 1823 to 1829. A more likely choice would have been Leo XIII, Pope from 1878 to 1903, that is to say during the early years of Henry's boyhood. The choice of Leo XIII would indicate that Darger's intense religious involvement originated in the period of his baptism and his early educational experience at the Mercy Home for Boys when he would certainly have learned about the reigning Pope; possibly he confused the numerals XII and XIII.

¹⁶ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 459–460. Darger's attitude toward Jews never becomes entirely evident, though it may be supposed he had the typical prejudices of a Catholic boy at the turn of the century. In volume eight of *The Realms*, a rumor is circulated among the Glandelinians "that Jennie Turner is an Abbieannian Jewess, who had a parent of the Hebrew. After studying spying in Northern Abbieannia, she had started into the army. Her amazing talents were recognized by the Vivian Girl Princesses, with the result that she was made chief of espionage in Abbieannia." This passage might seem to suggest an admirable degree of tolerance on the part of the Vivian princesses. However, the response of Angelinia Aronburg to the news shows a somewhat less enlightened attitude. "And so Jennie Turner is a Jewess is she. Wait til I call her a Jew. Won't she be surprised. A Jewis or a Jewess eh. Well if she's a Jew, then I'm a hindoo. Well I never. That's the strangest remark I ever heard" (p. 232).

"... poor general Wienstien the best friend of the Vivian girls was killed" in volume thirteen, the final vol. of *The Realms*, p. 3078.

¹⁷ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 272.

¹⁸ Ibid. Darger's personal library contained two copies of the catechism. In one of these booklets, "Catechism of Christian Doctrine" (H. L. Kilner and Co., Philadelphia, 1901), an inscribed name is crossed out, and the name Henry Darger is written in. This may well be the copy given to him when he was a boy and learning his catechism. In later years he occasionally occupied his time by copying out its questions and answers.

¹⁹ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 463.

²⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, pp. 11–231 [463–464].

²¹ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 286.

²² This theologically unique idea, presumably invented by Darger, may derive from its opposite, demonic possession. Its implications are explored in detail in the later volumes.

²³ *The Realms*, vol. ten, p. 692.

²⁴ *The Realms*, vol. ten.

²⁵ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 463.

²⁶ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12–178a (2436). One of the most charming passages in *The Realms*, too long alas to be included here, is the children's dream of a visit to paradise, where they meet with the Virgin Mary, as well as seeing St. Michael, Jesus, the Holy Ghost, and God. Darger asks, "what if it really happened to Violet and her sisters, instead of in a dream?" *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 588 and following.

²⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 152.

²⁸ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 3.

²⁹ *The Realms*, vol. eight (unbound), p. 167.

³⁰ The category of "Holy Innocents" is used in the church to refer to the children put to death by Herod of Ascalon, King of Judea, in his well-known attempt to kill off the infant Jesus as a potential claimant to the throne. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), vol. 1, pp. 56–9. Darger uses the term to refer to innocent children put to death in *The Realms*.

³¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12–232b.

³² Nathan Lerner, remarks in an interview of December 1987.

³³ Darger uses the term atheist on occasion and clearly understood its meaning. Among the loose sheets preserved in Henry's room is a handwritten poem entitled "To an Atheist." Written in Henry's hand, it is probably not by him. It begins, "How can you look at a sky full of stars, and say there is no God." He also refers to the enemy as Glandelinian anarchists.

³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3186. While this opinion is that of a Glandelinian soldier toward the end of the war, it underlies all Glandelinian protestations of atheism and their predictions of ultimate victory. The irregular use of capital letters in this passage is copied correctly.

³⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1407. The reference to four years is significant in that Darger's mother died a few days before his fourth birthday. Whether she was a Catholic is not known with certainty. It is fairly certain that his father, at least originally, was not, since the rest of the family consisted of German Protestants and masons. The decision to send Henry to Catholic schools

probably implies that his mother was Catholic. It may be that at the time of his parents' marriage a promise had been made to raise any children in the mother's faith.

³⁶ This historical account of religion and politics in *The Realms* is found in a curious separate document written by Gertrude Angeline and called "Powerful Abbieanna." It describes the arrival of Christianity, the Glandelinian break with the other nations and with God, and the onset of rebellion and war in 1841. The document is found in Darger's Reference Ledger, pp. 430-437.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

³⁸ The Glandelinians' hostility to religion extends to all Christian sects. Their war cry makes this clear. "Death to all Christians no matter what nationality. Death to all Papists, protestantants and other religions. Down with even Free Masions who are against us."

³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. two, pp. 864-867. References to "the Glandelinian Goddess Golie, the particular deity of the Glandelinian thugs," indicates that this entire section has been borrowed from an as yet unidentified source. The reference to Glandelinian thugs is probably derived from Hindi usage, referring to groups of professional robbers and murderers, who strangled their victims.

⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. two, p. 867.

⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 582.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, p. 553.

⁴⁵ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1182.

⁴⁶ *The Realms*, vol. four, p. 1183.

⁴⁷ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-391. This sacrilegious attack is unusual in that Darger tells us it had implications. "The Result of the Sacrelge Manley's frightful Defeat at the battle of Latruva" in which over 47,000,000 fell in a nine-hour battle.

⁴⁸ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3325.

⁴⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 260.

⁵⁰ Peter was crucified head down, not as an act of sacrilege, however, but at his own request. A famous early Christian graffiti image of the crucifixion, intended to lampoon the beliefs of the Christians, depicted an ass crucified on the cross.

⁵¹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 168.

⁵² *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 188.

⁵³ Matthew 18: 6.

⁵⁴ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 161.

⁵⁵ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 520.

⁵⁶ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ In chapter 10 above, I mentioned the inability of serial killers to truly believe in death as a reality, or even at times to distinguish between the living and the dead.

⁶⁰ Massive repression in connection with this death might also account for deficits in Darger's emotional response to death. Darger's father's death was also "a disappearance" since Henry only learned of it after the fact, but in that he was sixteen at the time his response was relatively normal.

⁶¹ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 223.

⁶² *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 500.

⁶³ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 9. Darger made use of a version of the same religious text he has modified here, in volume seven, p. 500.

⁶⁴ *The Realms*, vol. six, p. 226.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁶ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 109.

⁶⁷ The Vivian sisters are disguised as beggars.

⁶⁸ *The Realms*, vol. two, pp. 607-609.

⁶⁹ Another picture illustrates a similar incident: *At Zoe-Du-Rai-Becke. The result after Violet saves a priest and his Sacred Monstrance from being shot.*

⁷⁰ *The Realms*, vol. nine, pp. 9-884b/9-885.

⁷¹ *The Realms*, vol. nine, p. 9-886b. This incident is contained in yet another account of attempted sacrilege, in which the Vivian girls, while in church, shoot down the perpetrator before the high altar.

⁷² In volume six, Penrod does as much for his creator. "What is your name boy? 'Schoefield Penrod.' 'You mean you are the Penrod of Mr. Tarkington?' 'Now I know he's possessed' said the boy to himself, and loudly, 'I never heard of the man.'"

⁷³ *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3252. Given the number of deaths and disappearances in *The Realms*, followed by miraculous reappearances, rescues, and unexplained "resurrections," I found myself doubting the reality of what I had read. But Penrod really is dead, and he is absolutely forgotten from that moment on. He reappears, however, in *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*.

⁷⁴ Genesis 6: 17.

⁷⁵ The "Weather Books" extend from January 1, 1958, when Henry was sixty-five years old, through December 31, 1967, when he would have been seventy-five.

⁷⁶ Darger is remarkably even-handed in admitting that the Christians too set fires with terrifying consequences. "Evans however finally desisted in his onslaught, and acknowledged himself beaten, but to

satisfy his mortification, over his horrible thrashing, Evans gave a cruel and grim order. 'Set fire to the damn woods. I won't leave this spot until I see those woods aflame.' This was thus the starting goal of the worst scene of desolation the world ever dreamed of." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3079.

⁷⁷ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 737.

⁷⁸ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 575.

⁷⁹ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 602.

⁸⁰ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 575.

⁸¹ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 602.

⁸² *History*, vol. two, pp. 1069-1071.

⁸³ *History*, pp. 1071-1072.

⁸⁴ *History*, pp. 1072-1073.

⁸⁵ Diary entry, Monday, July 15, 1968.

⁸⁶ Diary entry, Monday, August 19, 1968.

⁸⁷ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 230.

⁸⁸ *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 230-231.

⁸⁹ "Found on sidewalk," questions 23 and 24.

⁹⁰ This observation can be documented with absolute precision in the later years, when Darger's diaries record his every visit to the church.

⁹¹ "Found on sidewalk," question four. Among Henry's papers is an address: "Dependent Child Commission, 1122 S. Wabash," which may reflect other realistic moves made in terms of his wish to adopt a child.

⁹² "Found on sidewalk," the latter half of question eight.

⁹³ Two separate copies of this document exist in Darger's room, one more extensive than the other. It is possible that the "shorter version" is simply lacking a second page, which the "longer version," on two pages, possesses. The longer version, consisting of twenty-four questions, is dated 1929, that is, when Darger was thirty-seven years old. The shorter version, on one sheet headed in pencil "Found on sidewalk," consists of only fourteen questions, and is dated 1930. It is this version of the document which includes a number of penciled answers, and the penciled question "Who wrote this." To the extent that the two versions overlap, they are almost identical. My discussion of the document makes use of both versions.

⁹⁴ "Found on sidewalk," question six. Darger's penciled answer, "Future will tell." As there is an element of repetition in the questions, we will examine only a small part of the list.

⁹⁵ "Found on sidewalk," question five.

⁹⁶ "Found on sidewalk," question two.

⁹⁷ "Found on sidewalk," question seven. Darger's response in pencil, "Yes to the first. No to the last."

⁹⁸ "Found on sidewalk," question twelve. Darger's answer to his own question, "No."

⁹⁹ "Found on sidewalk," question nineteen.

¹⁰⁰ "Found on sidewalk," question twenty.

¹⁰¹ "Found on sidewalk," question twenty-one.

¹⁰² In *The Realms* on several occasions he claims to have done so.

¹⁰³ This is true of many psychotics. Unable to achieve closeness to anyone, and increasingly remote from even the casual contacts of daily life, they begin to engage in lengthy conversations with themselves, often in a dramatic dialogue with their own hallucinations.

¹⁰⁴ "Found on sidewalk," question three.

¹⁰⁵ "Found on sidewalk," question eight. Darger's response, "Both." The final possibility, lack of ambition, is only considered in the version of the questions dated 1930.

¹⁰⁶ In part this was because the document "Found on sidewalk" encompasses only part of his desires, omitting all reference to his violent and sadistic drives.

¹⁰⁷ The detailed description of this day-by-day relationship is documented in his diaries from March 1968 on.

¹⁰⁸ "Found on sidewalk," question sixteen.

¹⁰⁹ "Found on sidewalk," question nine. Darger's answer, "Probably."

¹¹⁰ "Found on sidewalk," question ten. Answer, "can't tell."

¹¹¹ "Predictions and Threats," *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, the final volume, p. 3496.

¹¹² The version of this document which I believe, after careful study, to be the earliest is found in a diary kept by Darger between 1912 and 1917. Handwritten, it contains a series of predictions and threats dating from June 1912 to December 1917. A second version of the same document, somewhat more elaborate and with the dates changed, is found in volume one of *The Realms*, pp. 295-304. A third version, which is essentially a transcription of the one in volume one, is found in volume thirteen, the final volume of *The Realms*, pp. 3487-3497. These differing versions will be discussed in the pages which follow.

¹¹³ Since many of the dates given by Darger for the beginning of the writing of *The Realms* are also found in this document, these dates too are called into question.

¹¹⁴ There appears to have been an early three-volume version of *The Realms*, which was then enlarged over the course of many years, with dates and page numbers constantly altered to fit with the longer and longer version. The writing chronology of the book represents an exceedingly complex problem, which will involve detailed investigation, if the history of the evolution of Darger's text is ever to be understood. At the present time, even the arrangement of the separate volumes remains in question.

¹¹⁵ We do not know when exactly this four-and-a-half year conflict occurred, except that it obviously happened sometime before 1929. When did Darger return to the church and begin taking the sacraments again? It is certainly significant that the length of the Glandco-Abbieannian war was also a little more than four years.

¹¹⁶ "Predictions and Threats," number three. *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3488.

¹¹⁷ Diary entry, March 1, 1916. In the text of *The Realms* the same "Prediction and Threat" is dated March 1, 1912.

¹¹⁸ Diary entry, August 11, 1916.

¹¹⁹ Diary entry, May 16, 1916. This is the earliest date proposed for the beginning of the writing of *The Realms*, with the first manuscripts lost. This could imply that Darger began writing in 1909 almost as soon as he returned to Chicago.

¹²⁰ Diary entry, May 16, 1916.

¹²¹ Diary entry, August 1917. Research may reveal whether and when such an event occurred, thus enabling us to cross-check the dates being used in the diary. In *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3494, the date for this event is shifted back in time to August 1914.

¹²² Diary entry, August 1917.

¹²³ Diary entry, August 11, 1916.

¹²⁴ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," pp. 295-304. This threat, which forms part of the final "Grim Warning," is also present in Darger's diary, entry for September 1918. There he promises the death of the Vivian sisters, on July 4, 1919.

¹²⁵ Diary entry, December 6, 1917. The date of this entry is clearly impossible, since in the entry itself he mentions the discharge papers which are dated some twenty days later. Darger is clearly using the actual discharge paper preserved in his room to refresh his memory as to the dates of his enlistment and discharge.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ "Prediction of December 6th. 1913." *The Realms*, vol. thirteen, p. 3495.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ *The Realms*, vol. one, "Predictions and Threats," p. 295: Statements like these certainly conform to Darger's statement that he "had blasphemed God so often." In "Found on sidewalk" he expresses his concern that his defiance in *The Realms* may have offended God to the point that he is angry enough with him not to allow him to adopt a child. "Is his threat about making the christians lose the war if it is not answered anything to do with it?" (question five). "Has the proposition in the Glandco-Abbieannian War on the

conditions of the favor, such as refusing the christians victory if the petition is not answered the cause of the delay?" (question eleven). In short, Darger was of the opinion that his actions in the alternate world of *The Realms* might have serious implications in the real world.

¹³¹ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 456. This is one of very few occasions when Darger refers to a specific work of visual art in a specific museum. There is such a work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Entitled *Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*, it is the work of American sculptor George Grey Barnard (1863-1938). A celebrated work in its day, this enormous marble sculpture was executed in Paris in 1888 and given to the Metropolitan Museum in 1896. Its original French title is even more appropriate to Darger's understanding of its significance: *Je sens deux hommes en moi*, a quotation from a poem of Victor Hugo. Henry must have learned of its existence from a reproduction since he does not appear to have visited New York. I would like to thank Ms. Tiffany M. Lee, Administrative Assistant in 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum, for identifying Henry's reference. Michael Bonesteel has recently identified another work of art used by Darger as a collage element in one of his pictures. The picture in question is *At Jennie Richee. While sending warning to their father watch night black cloud of coming storm through windows*. Bonesteel has identified the collaged painting used as a view through the window as the work of the American painter Martin Johnson Heade: *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (1868). Bonesteel has identified Darger's source for this reproduction as the February 1945 issue of the *Ladies Home Journal*. However, in this case Darger merely responded to a picture he liked, adding it to his work as he added many other images, making no reference to it as a work of art. See Michael Bonesteel, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000, p. 17.

¹³² *The Realms*, vol. eight, pp. 396-397 and 401.

¹³³ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-369b.

¹³⁴ *The Realms*, vol. seven, p. 371.

¹³⁵ Darger was very much aware of Dante, and the *Inferno*, and occasionally seems to be competing with him.

¹³⁶ *The Realms*, vol. A, p. 4080.

¹³⁷ *The Realms*, vol. five, p. 772.

¹³⁸ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 536.

¹³⁹ *The Realms*, vol. twelve (unbound), p. 12-170b (2419 and 418).

¹⁴⁰ *The Realms*, vol. eight, p. 395.

¹⁴¹ *The Realms*, vol. eleven, p. 868.

¹⁴² This is strikingly less true of the pictures which, with the exception of the violent images we have examined, generally tend to reflect a more placid world of

children. There is a considerable disparity between text and illustrations in this respect, which may reflect the very different periods in Darger's life when they were created.

¹⁴³ "Found on sidewalk," question thirteen.

¹⁴⁴ In *The History of My Life* Darger tells of the much later period in his life when he was working at Alexian Brothers Hospital (1947-63), and apparently broke with God. Whether this is simply a chronological error is not certain, but the account of this "second break with God" seems curiously repetitive, except for the story of how it was brought to an end by reading religious picture books about hell. I believe he is describing the same event and has become confused about when exactly it occurred.

¹⁴⁵ I have taken this question very seriously, investigating newspaper accounts of the murder of Elsie Paroubek, in particular, with great care. There is insufficient evidence, after all the years, to link Darger with this death, in which he took an unnaturally great interest. The police records of the case are unavailable.

¹⁴⁶ As noted in chapter 11, serial killers, once launched on a career of sadism, rape, and murder, find it notoriously difficult to stop. They may stop for considerable intervals, especially early in their careers, and the irrational momentum then builds in intensity over time.

¹⁴⁷ Job 7: 11. In the context of this chapter it is of interest that Darger seems to have known The Book of Job, referring to it in *The Realms*, vol. A.

¹⁴⁸ While this is true in terms of Darger's more conscious motivation it should not be forgotten that unconscious sexual and aggressive drives and fantasies undoubtedly played a dominant role in forcing him to give voice early in his life to his deepest longings.

¹⁴⁹ A similar process of transformation can be felt in several of the literary masterpieces admired by Darger, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and most evident, John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*, a work for which Darger felt a special affinity.

¹⁵⁰ The presence of Christian mystical qualities in Darger's life and writings was first recognized by Nathan Lerner. In an interview conducted in December 1987, he remarked, "Henry's life - there's a certain kind of allegorical quality there, some very elemental things such as you find in St. Augustine. There is a mystic there. It always retains some of its childlike flavor, and yet raises it to the level of an epic drama, between God and man. Isn't that really the central core, the unknown force and his internal self? Not with the world, he leaves the world out of it. He's in his room and he's making up his own world, but still he has this tremendous fear and reverence. He not only loves God, but he taunts God. This is the absolute model of the Christian mystics. They fought with God, they struggled, they were tempted, but the reality of God is so intense to them. They were overwhelmed by it. He never doubts, does he ...?"

¹⁵¹ My discussion of the parallels with Christian mysticism has been deeply influenced by the thought and writings of Jesuit priest and scholar William Johnston. Familiar both with Western psychology, and with parallels in Far Eastern religious experience, he has examined the origins and early history of Christian mystical experience, while commenting extensively on the somewhat atypical mystical experience of modern man. In order to draw parallels between Darger's religious experience and that of better-known Christian mystics, I have used a number of passages from Johnston's book, *Christian Mysticism Today*, San Francisco, 1984. I would like to thank Father Johnston and his publishers, Harper and Row, San Francisco, for permission to quote from this extraordinary psychological study of mysticism.

¹⁵² The process involved is what C. G. Jung termed "identification with the archetype." At its most extreme this leads into psychosis, producing "a sort of inflation and possession by the emergent contents, so that they pour out in a torrent which no therapy can stop." See "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, 1959), vol. 9, p. 351. This process of identification with the deity is very common in schizophrenia. A magnificent example of such an identification is provided by the writings of Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, or by the writings and paintings of Adolf Wolfl. In Wolfl's case, the extreme intimacy of his relationship with God resulted not in a true identification but in his assuming the enhanced identity of St. Adolf II. For a discussion of the Wolfl case, see Walter Morgenthaler, M.D., *Madness and Art: The Life and Works of Adolf Wolfl*, trans. Aaron H. Esman, M.D., Lincoln, 1992.

¹⁵³ Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today*, pp. 19 and 45.

¹⁵⁴ The tendency to stumble into unconventional doctrines or outright heresy is implicit in mysticism, with the hermit monks becoming the source of many of the wild departures from orthodoxy with which the Catholic church had to deal in the early years.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁵⁶ Much of twentieth-century religious thought and mysticism has grappled with the existence of massive evil, and of God's seeming absence from His creation.

¹⁵⁷ Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today*, p. 65. Nathan Lerner, reading Darger as a mystic, echoes the same insight: "What Henry shows here is every man, every man has both God and the devil in him. In Darger this elemental struggle, because it is couched in a certain form, goes way beyond what every person feels. Yet, we read this, and we say, 'This is what we feel too.' It's on a very high level that he goes through this struggle." - Interview of December 1987.

Appendix A

¹⁵⁸ Darger's diaries and autobiographical writings contain no hint that he was in occasional contact with the people in his house (particularly David and Betsy Berglund), with Nathan and Kiyoko next door, or with the priests and parishioners at his church. We must assume that by this point his withdrawal was so complete that these human contacts barely registered with him.

¹⁵⁹ It is not known whether Darger was involved with collecting various kinds of twine earlier in his life, but references to this obsessional ritual occur with extreme regularity in the earlier section of the final diaries.

¹⁶⁰ For an immensely insightful psychoanalytic investigation of the symbolic implications of play with string and twine, see D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Harmondsworth, 1974, pp. 18–23, 50, and 126. My book *Metamorphosis: The Fiber Art of Judith Scott: The Outsider Artist and the Experience of Down's Syndrome*, Oakland, 1999, explores this subject in considerable detail.

¹⁶¹ Diary entry, Saturday, April 6, 1968.

¹⁶² Diary entry, Tuesday, April 23, 1968.

¹⁶³ Diary entry, Wednesday, August 21, 1968.

¹⁶⁴ Diary entry, Monday, July 15, 1968.

¹⁶⁵ Diary entry, Sunday, June 2, 1968.

¹⁶⁶ Diary entry, Tuesday, July 9, 1968.

¹⁶⁷ Diary entry, Saturday, October 12, 1968.

¹⁶⁸ Not to be confused with typical epilepsy, these electrical discharges produce brief or prolonged seizures of a very different kind. See Russell R. Monroe, M.D., *Creative Brainstorms: The Relationship between Madness and Genius*, New York, 1992.

¹⁶⁹ Van Gogh, who also suffered from probable manifestations of temporal lobe epilepsy, reported during his seizures experiences of "painful hallucinations and perverted religious superstitions." He speaks of "perverted and frightful ideas about religion," Letter 607. See Wilfred N. Arnold, *Vincent van Gogh: Chemicals, Crises, and Creativity*, Boston, 1992.

¹⁷⁰ Diary entry, Friday, April 26, 1968.

¹⁷¹ Diary entry, Sunday, August 4, 1968.

¹⁷² Quoted from *History* during interview with Nathan Lerner, December 1987.

¹⁷³ Diary entry, Tuesday, April 16, 1968.

¹⁷⁴ *History*.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Nathan Lerner, December 1987.

¹⁷⁶ *The Realms*, vol. three, p. 823.

¹ Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, New York, 1995, p. xvi.

² For a detailed description of the effects on various aspects of behavior of this disorder, see Oliver Sacks, "A Surgeon's Life," *ibid.*, pp. 77–107.

³ Oliver Sacks, "Tourette's Syndrome and Creativity," *British Medical Journal*, 305 (1992), pp. 1515–16.

⁴ For a discussion of this rare genetic condition, see Paul P. Wang and Ursula Bellugi, "Williams syndrome, Downs syndrome, and cognitive neuroscience," *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 147: 11 (1993), p. 1246. Paradoxically, while teenagers with Williams syndrome are capable of much more fluent use and comprehension of grammar and vocabulary than those with Down's syndrome, children with Down's syndrome are able to draw pictures with better organization than those with Williams syndrome.

⁵ I mentioned this possibility in my 1992 essay "I see a World within the World: I dream but am Awake," in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Princeton, 1992, p. 277, endnote 34.

⁶ Stephen G. Waxman and Norman Geschwind, "Hypergraphia in Temporal Lobe Epilepsy," *Neurology*, 24 (1974), pp. 629–36.

⁷ David Bear, "The Neurology of Art: Artistic Creativity in Patients with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy." Paper presented at "The Neurology of Art" symposium, Art Institute of Chicago and Michael Reese Hospital, Chicago, 1988.

⁸ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 163.

⁹ See Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend*, Chicago, 1993.

¹⁰ See John M. MacGregor, "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption," *Raw Vision*, 13 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 26–35.

¹¹ Freud's diagnosis of this case was, in fact, paranoia (dementia paranoides). He was at the time (1911) attempting to introduce the term "paraphrenia" as a means of replacing the old term dementia praecox, as well as Bleuler's new (1911) term "schizophrenia." For a full discussion of this case, see Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter, "Translator's Introduction" to *Daniel Paul Schreber*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 1–28.

¹² Guy Roux and Muriel Laharie, *Art et Folie au Moyen Age: Aventures et énigmes d'Opicinus de Canistris (1296–1351)*, Paris, Le Léopard d'Or, 1997. President of the International Society for the Psychopathology of Expression, Dr. Guy Roux's recent study of Opicinus de Canistris intentionally reintroduces the term paraphrenia as a diagnosis for both Opicinus and tentatively for Darger.

¹³ See DSM-III-R, third edition, Washington, American Psychiatric Association, 1980, in which this term is renamed "schizotypal personality disorder."

¹⁴ Quoted with permission from a personal letter dated February 12, 1994, from San Francisco psychoanalyst Kenneth S. Benau, Ph.D.

¹⁵ Some of the features of schizoid personality disorder are shown by autistic adolescents and adults who have made a partial recovery from their disorder.

¹⁶ Autism as a new psychiatric syndrome was almost simultaneously described by two psychiatrists working completely independently in America and Europe, Leo Kanner, who introduced the term "early infantile autism" in 1943, in a paper entitled "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact," in *Nervous Child*, 2 (1943), pp. 217–50; and Hans Asperger who utilized the identical term in the following year in Vienna. See Hans Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter," *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, 117 (1944), pp. 76–136, translated by Uta Frith, as "Autistic Psychopathy in Childhood," in Uta Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 37–92. All further references are to this edition.

¹⁷ Asperger's syndrome as a possible diagnosis for Henry's abnormal personality was first drawn to my attention in conversation with the late Dr. Peter Oswald. Ongoing discussion with Oliver Sacks, including detailed comparison between the cases of Steven Wiltshire and Darger, again focused my attention on Asperger's syndrome. My conviction that this was the most probable diagnosis was finally confirmed by conversation with, and study of the writings of, Dr. Sula Wolff of Edinburgh, a specialist in the study of autism and related conditions, who, after encountering Darger for the first time at a lecture I gave in Madrid, immediately urged me to look into Asperger's syndrome as a possible explanation for the unique forms assumed by Darger's creative impulse. See Sula Wolff, *Loners: The Life Path of Unusual Children*, London, 1995.

¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted I will use the term "autism" from this point on to refer to high-functioning children or adults in the sense intended by Asperger, which includes individuals of normal or superior intelligence and fluent language. Some authorities consider that Asperger's syndrome as manifested in adulthood is identical to schizoid personality disorder. See Digby Tantam, "Lifelong Eccentricity and Social Isolation II: Asperger's Syndrome or Schizoid Personality Disorder?" *British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 153 (1988), pp. 783–91.

¹⁹ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 250.

²⁰ Jessie Park, a child autistic artist, is also obsessed with weather anomalies. See Clara Claiborne Park, *The Seige: The First Eight Years of an Autistic Child*, Boston, 1982.

²¹ S. Baron-Cohen, "An Assessment of Violence in a Young Man with Asperger's Syndrome," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 29 (1988), pp. 351–60.

²² Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," p. 79.

²³ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 246.

²⁴ Speaking of a married autistic couple, Sacks writes, "They recognized their own autism, and they had recognized each other's, at college, with a sense of such affinity and delight that it was inevitable they would marry." *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 276.

²⁵ A. Mawson, A. Grounds, and D. Tantum, "Violence and Asperger's Syndrome: A Case Study," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147 (1985), p. 569.

²⁶ Baron-Cohen, "An Assessment of Violence in a Young Man with Asperger's Syndrome," p. 35. My lack of any clinical experience with violence as a factor in autism and Asperger's syndrome necessitates extensive reverence toward the few articles by authorities with expertise in this area.

²⁷ Digby Tantam, "Asperger Syndrome in Adulthood," in Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, p. 176.

²⁸ Mawson, Grounds, and Tantum, "Violence and Asperger's Syndrome: A Case Study," pp. 566–9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 569.

³⁰ Baron-Cohen, "An Assessment of Violence in a Young Man with Asperger's Syndrome," p. 352, quoting Mawson (1985), and Wing (1986). Psychiatric study of the psychology of some serial killers unmistakably reveals schizoid disorders. Whether these states are connected with an early onset and possibly Asperger's syndrome is not yet apparent, but serious disturbances with empathy make such a diagnosis very probable in some cases.

³¹ Digby Tantam, "Lifelong Eccentricity and Social Isolation I. Psychiatric, Social, and Forensic Aspects," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153 (1988), p. 781.

³² This discussion of the possible advantages of the experience of Asperger's syndrome depends for its insights entirely on Hans Asperger's classic study of 1944, and on the writings on autism and related conditions of Oliver Sacks, particularly *An Anthropologist on Mars*.

³³ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 277.

³⁴ Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," p. 74. See also Sula Wolff, "Schizoid Personality, Pretence and Genius: Two Extraordinary People," in *Loners: The Life Path of Unusual Children*, London, 1995, pp. 150–72, which includes a discussion of Asperger's syndrome and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

³⁵ Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tantam, "Asperger Syndrome in Adulthood," p. 161, quoting Wing.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 276, n. 10.

⁴³ Wolff, *Loners: The Life Path of Unusual Children*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," p. 70.

⁴⁵ Asperger and others have noted that the handwriting of Asperger children and adults is particularly poor owing to the manual clumsiness that is a regular aspect of the disability. This is evident in Darger's handwriting which never went beyond the style he developed as a boy, although it manifests numerous changes within this adolescent style as he ages.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁷ Digby Tantam in his essay "Asperger Syndrome in Adulthood" makes a serious effort in this direction, describing disturbances in what he terms "pragmatic abnormalities of speech." Also essential reading for anyone interested in Asperger syndrome and written language is Francesca G. E. Happé, "The Autobiographical Writings of Three Asperger Syndrome Adults: Problems of Interpretation and Implications for Theory," in Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, pp. 207-42.

⁴⁸ Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," p. 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵² Ibid., p. 71.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Temple Grandin, "Needs of High-Functioning Teenagers and Adults with Autism," *Focus on Autistic Behavior*, 5: 1 (April 1990), pp. 1-16.

⁵⁵ The classic study of Nadia is Lorna Self, *Nadia: A Case of Extraordinary Drawing Ability in an Autistic Child*, London, 1977. A vast literature now exists which discusses this case. Stephen Wiltshire has also inspired a series of books, though the most thoughtful discussion of the case is Oliver Sacks, "Prodigies," in *An Anthropologist on Mars*, pp. 188-243. To these studies I would add my book, *Dwight Mackintosh: The Boy who Time forgot* (Berkeley, 1992).

⁵⁶ "Hermelin, who has studied [low functioning] autistic savants for many years, feels that though they may have enormous talents, they are so lacking in subjectivity and inwardness that major artistic creativity is beyond them." Quoted in Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, p. 295. The case of Dwight Mackintosh, which may have involved both mental retardation and classic autism, may represent an exception to this observation, since Dwight's art is unmistakably of serious artistic importance, and differs in this respect from the creations of the mentally handicapped. Sacks also draws attention to the opinion of Christopher Gillberg, who feels that "autistic people of the Asperger type, in contrast, may be capable of major creativity." Darger's case clearly confirms this opinion.

⁵⁷ Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," pp. 72-3.

⁵⁸ See S. Baron-Cohen, A. M. Leslie, and U. Frith, "Mechanical, Behavioral, and Intentional Understanding of Picture Stories in Autistic Children," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 4 (1986), pp. 113-25.

⁵⁹ A parallel phenomenon can perhaps be observed in Temple Grandin's ability to experience oddly human feelings and responses in the world of animals, when nothing of this capacity for empathy is to be found in her response to human beings. See Oliver Sacks essay on Temple Grandin, "An Anthropologist on Mars," in the book of the same title, pp. 244-96.

Appendix B

¹ Michael Bonesteel, in his book, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, New York, 2000, pp. 34-5, endnote 36, discusses my attempt at "the identification and naming of the unbound volumes." His discussion was, however, based on my unpublished and entirely tentative early notes, which he had acquired. These notes were made well before I had read all of the unbound volumes, and before I had reached (in 1997) the carefully considered, yet still tentative, conclusions presented here. In light of the classification presented here, it is of some interest that we both agree that volume C is the missing volume nine, and that volume seven (unbound) is probably the second to last volume in the series. We both agree that volume B (unbound) is the final volume in the series. The only difference in our sequences concerns volume A, which I have not attempted to place in the series, and which Bonesteel suggests might be the third to last volume. The fact that these two systems of classification were arrived at independently does perhaps suggest that they are correct.

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